anyway, it's about old friends.

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anyway, it's about old friends.

by circlegames

Summary

In which Charlie Dalton and Knox Overstreet can’t stop bumping into each other over the years, even though they can’t stand the other.

Or: Knox has been infatuated with Charlie Dalton ever since their drive to New York all those years ago.

Notes

hello!!!! <3 i'm SO excited about this one!!

i'm on fire

Knox Overstreet was, if nothing else, punctual. Which is why, when he arrived to pick up a stranger from a girl that lived on his floor, he was annoyed at the blatant way that they were going to be starting a little after his scheduled time.

The girl in question, Liz Halloway, was currently sucking face with her boyfriend. Annoyed that he didn't really know either, Knox honked his horn. "Come on, Liz!" He called out, blatant to the students racing away from Northwestern's campus.

"Gimme a second, Knox." She complained, going back to kissing the boy before her.

The boy in question was Charlie Dalton. Knox didn't know a single thing about him except that he was Liz's boyfriend, and he also needed to go to New York City. Knox was moving to get away from Chicago after having lived there through university, and he knew that Charlie was also moving back. He was from New York, or at least, that is what Liz had relied to him two days prior while she begged him to drive her boyfriend home. Knox had reluctantly agreed, mostly because he simply couldn't say no to people.

Charlie was still smooching Liz, and Knox felt like collapsing back into his chair. What was with these people?

"Come on! We've gotta go."

"I'll call you." Charlie pulled away, and Knox was mortified at the amount of spit that was still connecting the two together. "I'll call you every day. Every time we stop, I'll call you."

“Please,” Liz responded, carding her hands through his hair. Charlie wasn’t much taller than her. “I’ll miss you so much.”

“So much. Me too.”

“I’ll die without you.”

“You can’t. I won’t let you.”

Knox honked his horn again. He loved a goodbye scene, but only in the movies. If this was what one looked like in real life, he never wanted to experience it. “Let’s go!” He barked, and Charlie finally turned towards him, motioning for him to unlock his trunk. He had only two suitcases. Knox made a mental note to ask about it as he threw them into the back, kissing Liz a few more times for good measure.

Finally, the shorter boy was next to him, buckling his seatbelt. “I love you, Liz!”

“I love you too!” She was saying something else, but they couldn’t hear her, as Knox was already pulling away, eager to make up for lost time.

“So,” Charlie said immediately, the persona of a lovesick, depraved boyfriend immediately dropping away, “What brings you to New York City?”

“I got a job there, so I’m moving back.” He answered, not sure how

long they could keep up the small talk. It was a long drive, and they'd be splitting it up into two days. Knox had saved just enough money after paying for his apartment downpayment that he could afford to not die on the road of sleep deprivation.

"You ever been to New York?"

"Yes. My family is from Delaware originally, but we moved up to Brooklyn when my Dad got a job in the city when I was little. Why are you going back?"

"I miss it. I have a life and job and stuff there."

"You don't have much stuff to be moving back."

"I travel light."

Knox didn't know what else to say, so he focused on the Chicago traffic, eager to get to their destination of the night, Cleveland.

"When are we gonna stop? I'll get hungry."

"We aren't going to stop until Cleveland."

"Do you have a girlfriend?"

"What?"

“Do you have a girlfriend?” Knox felt his face grow red as he could feel Charlie’s eyes on him. He was embarrassed. He couldn’t exactly talk about his last few dating escapades, as none could really be discernible as girlfriends. “Cleveland is far away. This sucks.”

“No.”

“Really?”

“Yep.”

“Do you not like girls?”

“I like them fine.”

“So you’re gay?”

“I didn’t say that.”

“You didn’t say no.”

“Are you?”

“I’m with Liz.”

“No. I don’t have a girlfriend. Right now, anyways.”

“But are you gay?”

“Can we drop this? I don’t even know you.”

“I don’t know you.” Charlie said, watching Lake Michigan fly by. “Let’s play twenty questions to get to know each other better.”

Knox wanted to do anything but play twenty questions with the man sitting next to him. Anything to get him to stop talking. He wasn’t going to be his friend, and he certainly didn’t want to be after his last few questions. He was incredibly direct, and a bit affrontive. Knox could tell he was popular back at school, just from how he exerted himself to the world. He wanted to say no, could feel the words forming on his tongue and almost yelled it, but remembered that he had to spend nearly fifteen hours in a car with this stranger. “Okay. We can pass the time.” He found himself saying instead.

“Do you like men? Romantically?”

“Not answering. Are you homophobic?” Knox countered.

“What? Why are you asking me that? Of course not.” He seemed more offended by the question than Knox had thought he would be.

“You keep bringing it up. I said to just drop it.”

“But you’re never going to see me again after today. What the hell do

you care?”

“Because I can’t drive you to New York City if you don’t like people who like boys because then I can’t drive you.” Knox found himself spewing, cursing Charlie for pulling it from him.

“Got you.” Charlie grinned, “That’s my first question.”

Knox scoffed. He was, admittedly, pretty obvious. He liked to wear lots of pink, read funny little romance novels on the quad, and couldn't live a day without cuffed jeans. He had a little daisy taped to the front of his car from his younger sisters, and a scent that said Coconut Cabana Party! was floating in the air conditioning of his car. “Well how…?”

“Not your turn.”

“What?”

“That’s how the game works. It’s my question.” He ran a hand through his hair, pulling down the mirror to look at himself. It took longer than Knox was anticipating it would have. “Okay, second question. How do you know my girlfriend?”

“Liz?” Knox carefully got onto the highway out of Chicago, preparing for the traffic that was sure to follow him. “She lives down the hall from me. I don’t know her otherwise. I was talking to my roommate about how I was going back to New York two days ago and she came up to me and asked me if I could drive you home. I don’t tend to like driving by myself for a long time, so I said yes.”

“Interesting. I’ve never seen you before, so I was just wondering.”

“We were in the nursing class together, but I never talked to her.”

“Oh, okay.”

“My turn. What’s your degree in?”

“Business. I’m going to work for my dad’s company on Wall Street. Why did you go to nursing school?”

“Always liked it. My mom’s a nurse. What’s your favorite color?”

“Red. How many siblings do you have?”

“Two. They’re both younger than me. Gwen’s fifteen. Nora’s twelve. I’m the eldest. How many siblings do you have?”

“I’m an only child. Were you in any clubs?”

“No, I didn’t really have time. I tried out the poetry club a few days, but I didn’t like most of the people there, so I left. Were you in any?”

“Art club, debate team, poetry club, I was president of the student government for a little bit. I’ve done everything a few times around. I was on the rowing team too. I quit that eventually. They wanted to draft me for the Olympics. Too much of a commitment.”

Knox raised an eyebrow, not sure how much of what was spewing from Charlie's mouth was the truth and how much of it was a lie. Perhaps he'd never know. The game continued on like that for awhile, a bit awkward between each response and a little confusing. After the game was finished, they still had a few hours to get to Cleveland, so Charlie began to tell him the woes of being cast in one of the college's school musicals, despite not being a theatre major. It was all very confusing, and was even more confusing that he'd played a lead. He'd learned that Charlie's favorite holiday was Halloween, that he was a Saggitarius, that he liked to read and write, he was managing a 4.0 with his course load, and he had become so popular around campus that multiple frats had asked him to join their houses.

Knox, while trying his best, did not like Charlie Dalton. The hours in the car stretched on and on, and it was terribly painful and boring. He was very self centered and loud, and it was all just a bit too much for Knox. Miles shrank down from hundreds to the tens as they swirled towards Cleveland.

"Can we please stop soon? I think I'm going to die." Charlie lamented dramatically, throwing his seat back as he did so.

"Stop complaining. I have a motel booked." Knox rolled his eyes. He was going to have to ask for extra sheets, as at the time he'd booked the thirty dollar motel for the night, he hadn't thought to ask for two beds. He was always getting himself into the worst case scenarios. How he kept ending up where he was ending up, he never knew.

"Well, I sure hope there's not one bed. Most people find me irresistible."

"Well I'm not one, so don't get your hopes up."

“Oh, you wound!” Charlie made a sound like he was being stabbed, and Knox sighed loudly.

“It’s called the Marigold Dream Motel. There’s a little diner across the street. Or, there was when I called to ask where the closest place to eat was. It’s probably going to be really shitty. You can handle someplace like that for one night. Right, trust fund?”

“You’ve got a mouth on you, don’t you?”

“You’re getting on my nerves. It’s been a long day.”

“We could have gotten here sooner if we hit the tolls.”

“I don’t believe in wasting my money like that.”

“I could have paid for it.”

“Believe me, I don’t want your charity.” Knox rounded the corner a little too quickly, and they both grunted from the impact. “Look,” He said, pointing with his left hand towards the motel, a diner across from it.

“Let’s eat first. Then check in.”

“I’m checking in first.”

“Fine. I’ll start without you.”

“Fine.”

“*Fine*.” Charlie huffed, jumping out of the Subaru before Knox had even parked the car.

Knox had never been more irritated in his life. Even his freshman year roommate hadn’t been this horrible. Not bothering to lose more patience over someone he was only going to know for another eighteen hours, Knox locked his car, hopping up and in to the motel’s front entrance.

There was tacky flowered wallpaper. It was yellowing, and Knox felt like reciting something like *don’t let the bed bugs bite!* as he looked around. Surprisingly, a young woman met his glance, putting down a fashion magazine she was looking at.

“You got a reservation?” She asked, already typing away and writing things into a little notebook.

“Yep. Overstreet. I had booked one room with one bed originally, but I was wondering if there’s a chair or something in the room. I had an unexpected guest join me on the ride home.”

“Yeah, there’s a chair. Not comfy though. We can drop some extra sheets off if you want the floor.”

“Fine,” Knox nodded, taking the room key from her.

“Cool. You’re all checked in. Pay tomorrow morning before you leave.

It's room 114, right outside and to your left. Enjoy your stay."

"Thanks," He gave a brief wave as he turned, pocketing the key. He'd use it after he joined Charlie in whatever nonsense he was surely causing at the diner across the way. He didn't bother to read the name of it as he stepped inside, finding Charlie sitting by himself in a booth, looking through a menu. For once in his life, he wasn't talking. Finally!

"You ordered yet?" He asked, sneaking into the space across from him.

"No."

"Cool." He grabbed the menu that was across from Charlie that he wasn't using, and began to peruse it.

They both looked at their menus in silence, and eventually a waitress came and went with their orders, which had both been for breakfast food.

"So, you're a pancakes kind of person." Charlie began, crinkling his nose.

"You're waffles."

"I guess we all have our faults." Charlie grinned, and it looked a little bit evil.

“Did you call Liz?”

“Don’t want to. I’ll call her after we eat.”

“Right,” Knox nodded, although he wasn’t sure Liz was ever going to get a call. After he’d asked about her earlier, Charlie hadn’t mentioned her since.

“Would you sleep with me?”

“What?” Knox coughed, nearly choking on his decaffeinated coffee.

“Well, would you?”

“This isn’t twenty questions.”

“Answer me.”

“What the fuck?”

“Come on. Be honest.”

“No!” Knox shook his head a little too violently. “What the fuck, Charlie?”

“Just wondering. I mean, I’m irresistible to people.”

“You mentioned that. It hasn’t worked for me. Besides, that’s really rude of you to ask me that.”

“How is it rude?”

“You don’t… ugh. You’re impossible. You don’t even get it.”

“Well, I wouldn’t sleep with you either, if you’re wondering.”

“Glad we figured that out.” Knox made an annoyed sound, but changed immediately as the waitress placed a stack of strawberry pancakes in front of him. Charlie had a stack of waffles in front of him, bacon next to it. He reached for the syrup, already chewing on a piece of the bacon as he stared at Knox, who was staring at his pancakes.

“You’re not my type, is why.”

“I didn’t ask.”

“Well, I usually like red heads, is all.”

“Is that why you’re not calling Liz?”

“What?”

“Liz has brown hair,” Knox mumbled around his pancakes.

“So?”

“What are you talking about? Redheads?”

“Oh. *Oh*.” Charlie laughed, the sound so loud that Knox felt the hair on the back of his neck prickle. “In guys.”

“I’m not following…”

“I’ve only dated redheads before. So I think you’d be a rude awakening for me.”

“There’s no way that *you* like men.”

“You’re not very good at reading people. That’s okay. I’ll forgive you this one time.”

“So you like men too?”

“*Obviously*.” There was that loud laugh again.

“Why didn’t you say anything earlier then?”

“I thought everybody knew I was bisexual. I’m like the patron saint of

bisexuality on campus.”

“I’ve never seen you on campus.”

“Not my fault you weren’t popular.”

“This is so stupid.”

“You can say you’re attracted to me, Knox. It won’t kill you.”

“I’m repulsed by you.”

“Feisty,” Charlie grinned, and Knox felt his stomach drop. Whatever had happened in the last twelve hours were some of the strangest of his life. He couldn't wait for this trip to be over. He did not like this guy.

“Let’s just finish eating, alright?”

“Are you bisexual too, or do you just like guys?”

“Yeah,” Knox replied, not wanting to speak to him any longer. He wasn’t too good at catching hints himself. “Bisexual.”

“Cool.”

Knox went back to his food, looking at anything except Charlie. He was anxious now. Charlie was making him nervous. He wanted to get good sleep, but he didn't think he'd be able to now with the obnoxious roommate he'd gained for the day.

Somehow, they ate the rest of their meal in silence. Knox checked his watch, the hands at 9PM. It had been a long day. He was eager to shower and get to bed. Charlie had been finished with his meal for a short time, and Knox decided that that was the best time to get out of the diner. They both paid, counting out tips before they left the restaurant. Charlie was trailing behind him.

"How's the room?"

"I haven't been in yet. We're in 114. The girl at the desk says there's a chair to sleep in. I had them bring extra sheets in."

"There's only one bed?" Charlie smirked, and Knox found himself groaning. "I knew you were trying to seduce me."

"Shut the fuck up, would you?"

That seemed to silence him as they crossed the street, Knox leading them to the room after he'd grabbed his backpack from the car and unlocked the door.

"Pretty big bed though, huh?" Charlie said aloud, and Knox didn't want to give him any satisfaction, but it *was* massive. A stack of sheets was laid atop it, a few extra pillows next to it.

As the girl had said, there was only one chair in the small room. The

bed took up more than seventy percent of the space. A small desk and desk chair sat next to it, and a door at the end of the room led into the bathroom.

“This is cute.”

“It’s fine. I’ll take the floor.”

“The floor?” Charlie scoffed, “You can’t be serious.”

“I asked for extra sheets so I could make something up. I don’t want to be near you.” Knox turned to him, and found that he was actually very close to him.

He hadn’t really had a good look at him all day, but suddenly all of his fighting air had been kicked from him as he looked over at Charlie. They seemed to study each other a minute. Knox took in Charlie’s hazel-green eyes. He was a few inches shorter than him. He was wearing a red t-shirt. He had an angular nose, sharp looking features. He was taking too long with this and fearing he’d overstayed that welcome, Knox stepped away to place his backpack next to the pile of sheets, eager to brush his teeth and head off to bed.

“I’ll shower first.” He said, not giving the other time to react as he hurried away. Minutes later, he was stepping out of the streaming bathroom in his pajamas, a matching pink set. Charlie was sitting on the bed, flipping through a *Welcome to Cleveland!* brochure before looking over at him.

Whatever Charlie was going to say, he decided against it, and the two switched positions. Knox began his work on making up the bed, trying not to think about Charlie. Certainly he wouldn’t think of him much after this night, unless someone were to ask about a bad experience he

would rather forget. Everything was just awkward and awful and it felt as though they were never going to get anywhere. He couldn't wait to get to New York where there were enough people to swallow him up and he would never see the guy who was currently singing Rhiannon by Fleetwood Mac in the shower ever again.

He took up the brochure reading as Charlie exited the shower, and Knox turned away, trying to get comfortable on the floor. He wasn't succeeding.

"Stop being so stubborn. What's wrong with you?" A pillow hit Knox's head, and the brochure flew out of his hands.

Frustrated, Knox pulled the pillow from his eyes to see Charlie staring down at him. He was wearing a white t-shirt and boxers, and looking at Knox as though he'd sprung two heads. "I'm not being stubborn. I just don't want to be around you. You should be able to understand that."

"I like to be around people, so I'm not getting it. Sorry." Charlie grinned, and it was a little too wide. "Just get up here. I'll put all the extra pillows you're laying on between us to create a wall."

"That's even more stupid than me sleeping on the floor."

"No it isn't! You're acting like such a victim right now. You paid for this room."

"Then why don't you just get down here?" Knox finally sat up, closer to Charlie than he thought he'd be. Charlie pulled back, the distance between them growing.

“I’m not sleeping on the floor. You shouldn’t either. Just get up here.” Charlie swung his legs over the side of the bed and grabbed Knox’s arm tenderly.

“What the hell?” Knox viciously tore his arm away, the tension between the two rising. He stumbled as he stood up, “Just leave me alone, okay?”

“You are so fucking impossible!” Charlie stood as well, and the space between them was once again too small. “Just sleep in the bed like a normal person who’s paid for a motel room. We’re only here one night. Just get in.”

“Why don’t you just get your own fucking room, huh? You’re a trust fund baby! Don’t touch me, alright?”

“What’s your problem?”

“It’s none of your business!” Knox felt like something had been unlocked within him that had been boiling silently all day. This was edging towards dangerous waters.

“You know what, fine! Sleep on the fucking floor all you want. No wonder I’ve never seen you around before. I don’t think I could have stood being around you.”

“I can’t stand you either!”

“Fine then. Sleep on the floor and complain like a little baby.”

“I wasn’t complaining! You were the one who was… ugh! You know what? Nevermind.”

The air was still tense between the two, as neither had backed away once they’d gotten closer. Knox was watching Charlie’s eyes, and was a bit taken aback as they drifted over his face, but he decided to not look much more into it. They were at war.

Turning from him, Knox settled back onto his makeshift, horrible bed. “Turn the lights off when you go to sleep.”

“Fine.”

He heard Charlie padding over to his side of the room, and Knox was relieved as darkness enveloped the room in sweet silence. The air conditioning unit purred softly, and the fan above them twirled on and on. Despite how tired he was, he still couldn’t get around to actually falling asleep. Twisting and turning, the crick in Knox’s neck and back were getting worse. Determined to not give up, he kept moving around, the rustling sound loud in the room.

“Stop moving.”

“I’m getting comfortable.” Knox bit back, moving around again.

“You’re not going to get comfortable, asshole.”

“I just have to find the right position.”

“Just get up here.” Knox heard a rustling of sheets and pillows, and then silence. He wasn’t going to be defeated. A patting sound filled the room next, signaling that Charlie was waiting for him. “This is like a mega king-size. I won’t even be near you. I wouldn’t want to be anyways.”

“I’m fine down here.”

“Fuck you.”

“If I get up there, do you promise not to talk to me for the rest of this trip?” Knox found himself asking, not sure where the defiant question had come from.

“The rest of the trip?!”

“The rest of the trip.”

“You’re impossible. *Fine*.”

There was another sound of rustling sheets, and then Knox was slipping into the bed, as close to the other side as possible. He couldn’t wait for it to be morning. Unsurprisingly, the bed was very comfortable, and Knox felt the exhaustion he’d been facing all day creep deeply into him. He was soon within a dreamless sleep.

The next morning flew by without much error. Knox had awoken after Charlie, who was brewing himself coffee in a little machine that the

motel had set haphazardly upon the desk. Another cup was placed next to the one Charlie was staring at. He'd already changed into the clothes he was wearing the previous day, and a little bit of sunlight was slipping through the curtains. The digital clock read that it was nearly seven in the morning. Knox hadn't pegged him for an early riser, but he wasn't going to ask. It was going to be a blissful ride to New York without all of Charlie's yammering on.

They got around wordlessly, sipping the weak coffee and picking up after themselves. It didn't take long, and soon, Knox was heading to check out of the room, leaving his keys in the car and Charlie inside.

"Did you enjoy your stay?" The girl asked, the same one as last night. She must have not left yet. She was watching him carefully as he took the cash out of his wallet to pay.

"It was fine."

"The extra blankets work alright?"

"Yeah. Thanks."

"See you around."

Knox was glad that he wasn't going to ever be back in this motel. He never wanted to see the wallpaper again.

Soon, he was back in his trusty Subaru, and the open road was before them. The silence was blissful. Knox put in a Bruce Springsteen tape somewhere in Pennsylvania, and was even more ecstatic to hear the silence from Charlie during the rest of the trip. The eight hours

stretched out were long and painful, and then finally, they were rolling upon the city, the massive buildings and horrific traffic leading them in.

“Where do you want me to drop you?”

Charlie shrugged.

“Oh my god,” Knox rolled his eyes, his throat a little dry from not having talked all day. “Speak up and tell me.”

“Just drop me near the fountain in Central Park. I’ll just walk home from there.”

“Okay.” Knox agreed, following the roads he’d known all his life. It was nearly another hour before he’d pulled over into a space and Charlie was getting up and out without so much as a word. Knox had nearly pulled out of the spot before he turned to see Charlie, who was leaning down to look at him in the rolled down window of Knox’s car.

“Have a nice life, Overstreet. Thanks for the ride.” His eyes lingered a bit too long, and Knox found himself nervous.

“You too. See you never.”

“See you never.” Charlie replied, a smile spreading across his lips as he backed away, his hand in a half wave.

Knox didn't stay around to watch him go, so he quickly peeled out of the space, eager to get to his home in Brooklyn. He'd already put down money on an apartment, and everyone was going to help him move in before he started his new job within the week. The last twenty four hours floated near him, but felt farther and farther away the faster Knox drove.

Easily parallel parking, he smiled widely as he saw his sisters playing on the steps of their townhouse. He'd missed them, and the easy way they all got along.

"Knox!" Nora, the younger of the two, screamed. "Knox is home!"

This was home. And as the day wore longer and longer, Knox began to forget all about the hazel-green eyes and the sharp features. It was all blurring into a long ago memory.

been all around this great big world

Chapter Summary

> Charlie Dalton runs into Knox Overstreet (and friends) on a vacation from work.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It was another three years before Charlie Dalton caught sight of Knox Overstreet again. Charlie was on summer vacation, having taken a week off of work to relax and flirt mindlessly with other people on their own breaks. He was more than glad to have some time off, as ever since he'd moved back three years ago, he'd been swallowed so wholly by work that he barely had time to do anything else, and had really only made one friend, Neil Perry, who was quitting at the end of the month to go pursue his dreams.

Charlie was currently nursing his first drink of the night, looking around at the other bar patrons. There were a few couples, lots of groups of girls, and then there was a group of guys towards the end. They were all cheering. Some were huddled close together, some were talking, some were dancing. One at the end was swatting away the tallest, curling his drink to himself. "Go!" He laughed, and most of the group broke away, careening out of their space quickly and joining a group of girls that were dancing by themselves. It was a sweet gesture. The music blaring through the bar was The Beach Boys' California Girls, and the sweet breeze blowing softly through the space made the scene especially tourist-esque.

The guy who was left over was cute. Charlie wasn't too far away, but he couldn't make out all of his features perfectly. He felt himself crossing across the bar before he could think to stop, eager to introduce himself and see if he could get a moment of the other boy's eyes upon him. He thought he'd like to look into them, to be looked at by him.

“Hi,” Charlie spoke up, settling into the bar stool next to him. “You’re not dancing?”

“No,” He looked down at his drink. “No reason to.”

The other hadn’t really looked at Charlie yet, and for some reason, Charlie was almost certain that he’d seen this boy before. His lopsided grin, the disproportionate nose. The floppy bangs. Charlie’s stomach curled.

“What about you?” He asked, turning to him.

The look of shock and horror that passed over Knox Overstreet’s face was unlike anything Charlie had ever seen before. It was terrifying. It was exhilarating. It was attractive, just like he’d been the last time. He said he’d never see him again, and here was was.

“Overstreet, right?” Charlie grinned, hoping the gesture wasn’t a bit too wide.

“I’m not looking to get my night ruined.” Knox stood up, leaving his drink at the stool and immediately walking away from him. It hurt, to be looked down upon so quickly. Even if they hadn’t gotten along a few years ago, they were different people now, surely.

“Hey!” Charlie touched his arm, much like he had that night so many years ago, and it seemed to ignite some sort of fire in Knox’s eyes; just as it had the last time. There was something underneath the surface to all of that, Charlie was sure, but he was never going to get the chance to ask.

“Just leave me alone, asshole. Alright?” He looked sincere. So, his own hatred did nothing to hinder Charlie’s own that was brewing underneath the surface.

“I’m not trying to…you really have some sort of fucking problem, don’t you? You haven’t changed a bit.” He hadn’t meant to sound so harsh, but their last meeting hadn’t been exactly ideal. He couldn’t remember how they’d fought, but could remember that they had been constantly at the other’s neck, and he’d spent a rather silent day with the other.

In the end, he hadn’t minded all that much. It was a silent ride (apart from the music playing) and Charlie had used the silence as an excuse to think about what was to become of his life. He’d broken up with Liz as soon as he had entered back into his family’s apartment, and had spent the better part of the week thinking of the man in front of him.

“Just leave me alone, okay?” He wasn’t amused, and he certainly wasn’t going to keep talking to him.

“Knox!” A freckled, red-haired boy in a blue Hawaiian printed shirt came up to him, leaving the other freckled boy with the blonde and the tallest of their little group. He had a smile on his face, and he looked very happy. “Hi! Do I know you?”

“No.” Knox spoke for him, and that made Charlie’s gears turn.

“I”m Charlie Dalton.” He extended his hand past Knox over to the guy, and gave him a smile in return. Every friend in Knox’s little group was attractive. This was certainly going to be dangerous.

“I’m Richard Cameron, but everybody just calls me Cameron. How do you two know each other?” His eyes raked between the two, and

Charlie liked the way he spoke, the way he moved.

“We don’t.” Knox was quick to answer, the anger blatant in his eyes.

“Well, don’t lie to your friends about us, babe. It was one brilliant night.” Charlie laughed, the easy words falling from hus lips.

Cameron chuckled. “I guess he’s never mentioned you.”

“Can I talk to you?” Knox asked, dragging Charlie away from the conversation as he stared at him carefully, poised. “In private.”

“I see. I can take a hint.” Cameron laughed, giving Charlie a wink before he walked away. Charlie liked him immediately.

“We’re alone now.” Charlie said, watching Knox as he continued to stare.

“Come with me,” Knox placed his hand on Charlie’s lower back, ushering him towards a little alcove in the bar. There were glossy white curtains that were floating mindlessly in the sweet breeze, and it felt a little strange to be pressed so close behind them.

“Are you trying to kiss me?” The words came out a little huffed, and Charlie hadn’t meant to be so incredibly turned on by the closeness of it all, but then Knox opened his mouth and firmly cemented the hatred Charlie had for him.

“I don’t know who the fuck you think you are, but you have got to

leave me alone. I can't stand you. I don't want you to hit on my friends. Leave them alone."

"You think I'm trying to hit on your friends?" He couldn't help the scoff that came out of his mouth. "I thought I was hitting on you." There were dangers to this dynamic, surely.

"Shut up. Just leave them alone, alright?"

"So you remembered I can't resist a fiery red head."

"I don't know who you're trying to impress, but it's not going to work. Leave us all alone. Leave me alone."

"I wasn't seeking you out, believe me."

"Why are you even here?"

"I'm taking a trip from work."

"Don't you have something better to do? Get married to Liz?"

"I haven't seen Liz since the night you drove me back."

Something about that statement changed whatever Knox was thinking, as he furrowed his brow for such a brief moment, Charlie was unsure it had even happened.

“What are you doing here?” He wanted to counter, wanted to invoke. Wanted anything for Knox to look at him again just like he had a moment previously.

“I’m on vacation.”

“Well, same as me.”

“I’m celebrating.”

“What?”

“I’m asking the love of my life to marry me in the fall. It’s her favorite season.”

“If she’s the love of your life, why did your friend Cameron think you wanted to kiss me?” The words felt like a slap as they exited his mouth, and they looked as if they were when Knox’s eyes turned red.

“Shut up!” The words were loud, drawing eyes from a few couples that were nearby. He’d opened some sort of geyser there, and now Knox was gushing. “You don’t know anything about me, so don’t pretend like you do.”

“No. I guess I don’t, do I?” Charlie wanted to hold that gaze. He wanted to feel that rage that Knox was feeling, wanted to yell and scream at him and pull him a little bit closer.

“Leave me alone. And don’t hit on my friends.” Knox stepped closer to

say the last part, as though it were some kind of warning.

The words rolled off of Charlie's shoulders. He'd always been a little unsure of himself, making up for it in grand gestures and lots of talking. But this relationship he had with Knox, whatever it had been that night so long ago, and whatever it was right now, was something he needed to remember. Needed to commit so viciously to memory that he had no qualms with leaving his drink at the bar, mostly unfinished, and heading back up into his room.

He couldn't stop replaying the night. The night they'd had so long ago. There was something about that Overstreet boy. He couldn't name it. He felt annoyed by him. His stupid little lips, his stupid bangs. But, he couldn't help that drip of attraction, the want to know why touching him spooked the guy into a line, why his friend had thought there was more than a conversation to happen.

The exact details of all those night ago seemed a little fuzzy. Tonight was going to be something that was so etched into his mind that if he ever saw the other again, he wouldn't forget it. But, Charlie remembered a few things. Knox was a good big brother, he was sweet when he wasn't trying to bite his head off, and he was incredibly stubborn. The morning after Knox had finally fallen into the space next to him, Charlie had been cautious when waking up, hoping that slipping out from the boy's grasp wouldn't wake him. The carefully placed pillows had been thrown to the floor in a fitful sleep, replaced by a shorter man. Charlie had moved quickly to get out of bed, not wanting the suffering that was sure to come if Knox had awoken before him. He'd made him coffee, but he hadn't taken it. Then, Charlie been silent for the first and last time of his life.

As Charlie fell into a surely fitful rest, his mind kept wandering. Knox Overstreet seemed to fill every ounce of his mind. Charlie didn't want to dwell on it too much. This was a fluke, certainly, and he was never going to see him again.

Chapter End Notes

thank you guys so much for the positive response to the first chapter of this!!!!! <3333333

i was practicing living in regret

Chapter Summary

> Knox runs into Charlie (unfortunately once again) at the airport. He's engaged! Why does he think about kissing him? Everything's too confusing.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

A year after the incident in Hawaii, Knox was saying goodbye to his girlfriend, Chris Noel. *Fiancee* ! He reminded himself, pulling her back into a kiss as the JFK airport swarmed around them. She hadn't yet checked into her flight; they were still saying goodbye. She was going to be gone for two months at the least, as she was going to be acting in a film that her good friend Ginny was directing. Chris normally worked remotely anyways, writing reviews for various music publications, so she could continue that work anywhere. Ginny had written a wonderful love story that Knox knew Chris was perfect for. He'd read the script quickly, devouring each romantic bit. He didn't know who was playing Chris's lover, but whoever she was was sure to be brilliant. They both were. He wished his heart was little heavier in letting her go, but he knew how desperately she wanted to be a part of it, especially since Ginny had asked her specially, and he knew how important it was to her. So naturally, the project being so important to her automatically meant that it was important to him too. He loved her dearly, so anything that mattered so much to her certainly mattered to him just as fiercely.

People were passing all around them, running to their next flight, trying to get connected to whatever was going to pull them towards another place. Knox always found that whenever he had Chris were together, the rest of the world seemed to fall away. All he had to think about was this wonderful woman who wanted to spend the rest of her life with him.

"Holy shit!" A voice that was unfortunately recognizable sang out, pulling Knox apart from his current task at hand.

Charlie Dalton stood before him, just like he unfortunately had so many times prior. Knox felt his skin prickle. Every time he was trying to have a major life event, this poor excuse for a grown man was ruining it.

"Do I know you?" Chris grinned at him, the usual one she wore for new people. She was always so interested in meeting new people, in spending time around them.

"You're Chris Noel, right?" Charlie smiled back just as widely, and Knox was suddenly more alert than he had been all day. How did he know his girlfriend?

"Uh, yeah. I am."

"You write music reviews! I love your work. It's really good."

Chris perked into a beam of light at the comment. "You recognize me from my work?" She seemed baffled.

Knox was less than baffled. He had spent the better part of his life feeling that everyone was in love with her, and he was just lucky.

"Of course." What sort of tactic was this? Why was he ignoring him?

"I'm so blown away that you recognize me! Knox, isn't that amazing?" She turned to him, all sunlight and rainbows and everything good in the entire world and Knox felt himself melt like an ice cream cone just by looking at her.

“It’s great, babe.”

“I really should be going. I’m so happy to meet you. What’s your name?”

“Charlie Dalton.”

“Well Charlie Dalton, I hope you continue to read. I’ve got exciting things planned.”

She turned back to Knox, pressing a kiss to his cheek, whispering a goodbye. All too soon, she was running off to check in to her plane and Knox had missed her. All because of Charlie Dalton and his stupid way of worming back into Knox’s life like a snake that was incorrigble.

“What are you doing here?” He asked, leaning onto his luggage, probably coming from some stupid place that Knox didn’t want to ask about. He’d nearly ruined his last vacation. He wasn’t going to ruin Chris’ goodbye as well.

“I’m saying goodbye to my fiancee.”

“Your fiancee?” Charlie raised his eyebrows, clearly a surprised. “What do you mean, your fiancee?”

“Are you stupid?”

“I’m just asking, Knoxious.”

“Don’t call me that.”

“I can’t believe you’re getting married.”

“I asked her. She said yes. I love her. It isn’t complicated.”

“So she was the girl then?”

“What?”

“The girl that you said was the love of your life when we were in Hawaii.”

“Yes. I’m in love with her. I have been for a long while. She’s everything to me.” The words sounded forced due to the situation and his anger that was always pooling when he saw Charlie, but they were honest. Knox was head over heels; painstakingly, horribly and candidly in love with her. His eyes were still on her, and as she turned around to wave at him, they shared a blissfully silent moment and Knox knew that it was his time to leave. She didn’t want him to wait around for her, although he would have gladly waited a lifetime and a half.

“You heading out too?”

“I’m gonna grab a cab.”

“I drove. I can drive you back to your place. Make up for the time you drove me.”

“Believe me, that *won’t* be necessary.”

“I’m offering. Cabs are expensive back into the city. Allow me. It’s the least I can do after you unleashed hell on me at your bachelor party.”

Knox looked over at him, that simmering feeling deep in his gut. Was it desire? Was it loathing? He couldn’t quite name it, and he didn’t know if he would ever be able to. “I didn’t unleash hell. I told you that I was occupied. I’m a busy person, and you keep ruining things for me.”

“Do you want a ride home?”

“Not with you.”

“I’m not that bad. And I’ll do it for free.”

“Are you going to talk the whole way?”

“Probably. I want to know how you’ve managed to get Chris Noel, possibly the coolest, gayest girl in the reviewing biz.”

“What?”

“Your girlfriend’s famous, buddy.”

“I’m not your buddy. And she’s not my girlfriend. She’s my *fiancee* .”

“Oh, touchy. Sorry I said anything,” Charlie threw his hands up, the smirk he always wore widening against his lips.

“You can drive me home if you don’t talk to me.”

“Fine with me. You’re not much of a conversationalist.”

Knox looked anywhere but at the shorter man as he followed him through seas of people to his car. It was very fancy, a convertible BMW with hardly enough space to really constitute it being called a car. It looked like it was made for a child, but he was certain that it cost more than he made in a whole year. As Charlie opened it up and pulled down the hood, the smell of stale cigarettes wafted towards him. It didn’t smell good, and it didn’t seem like it was going to be something that he enjoyed. Silence would be blissful, much as it had been those few years ago.

Charlie carefully reversed, and then they were hurdling through the parking garage. Knox was on edge. He’d never flown so quickly in a vehicle before, and certainly not in a parking garage. While they stopped to wait for the payment, Charlie fiddled in his suit pocket, extracting a cigarette and fiddling in a part of the car before pulling out a lighter.

“Do you mind?”

“Not really. It’s my car.”

“I’m here too.”

“It appears so.”

“Do you get off on being such an asshole all of the time?”

“No,” Charlie chuckled, the sound warm and inviting. “Sometimes I get off when you’re not around to bother.”

“You’re a dick.”

“But I’m also hot, so it makes up for it.”

“What do you even do now?”

“I run my Dad’s company. Well, I will next year; after he retires. It’s the biggest bank in the city.”

“The city?” Knox shifted uncomfortably in the luxury seat. Charlie was wearing an Armani suit, his shoes looked like expensive Italian leather, and he wore it so casually that it could have been from the JCPenny’s, which is where Knox normally went if he wanted luxury.

“Well, I just have to run the city. It’s international though.”

“So you’re like… rich?”

“Do I look rich to you?”

“You’re wearing Armani.”

“What’s it to you? Looking a little closely, aren’t we?”

“What is your obsession with me?”

“I’m far from obsessed with you. The universe just has funny ways of putting us together.” He fished around in his pocket for his wallet as he pulled up to the woman who was working in the kiosk, handing her a crisp one-hundred dollar bill, telling her to keep the change.

“Why did you offer to drive me home?”

“You needed a ride.”

“Why did you really do it?”

Charlie didn’t answer as he merged into traffic. The silence was so loud that it felt like it was raining directly into Knox’s ears. He needed to know why he was driving him home, why they kept running into each other, why every time they got together it seemed that they grew farther apart but closer together.

“You needed a ride. That’s all.”

“Why did you ask me earlier why I’m dating Chris? Do you think

somebody like me couldn't be with her?"

"No. You just, well, you seem pretty boring."

"You don't know anything about me. Besides, she's perfect. It's hard to live up to somebody that's perfect."

"So she's the love of your life. What do you even care? You're already going to spend the rest of your life with her."

"Yes. I told you that in Hawaii and I told you earlier."

"Did you tell me in Hawaii before or after you wanted to kiss me?"

"What?" Knox was falling off a precipice.

"Your friend Cameron thought you wanted to kiss me. Did you?"

"Of course not. Chris is the only person I've thought about kissing for the last few years."

"I think you're lying."

"I think you should just drop me at the nearest subway."

“And I think that you’ve always been attracted to me. Ever since we met.”

“You’re in a different world than I am when we’re together then. Clearly.”

“I think I’m right.”

The tension in the car turned then, flipping directly onto its head. Knox felt like he was underwater, struggling to get another breath, struggling to do the right thing, say something that would stop whatever was pooling in the car and swallowing his feet, his knees, the water lapping all around him like it was a wave pool. “Do you want to kiss me?” He asked instead, trying desperately to tread.

“Well, it doesn’t matter if I do or don’t. You hate me, and I don’t like you very much either. Besides, you’re getting married, aren’t you?”

“We haven’t set a date yet.”

“Well, either way.”

“Either way what?” What the hell was coming out of his mouth? The water must have been over his head now, choking him into saying ridiculous things.

“Either way, I wouldn’t kiss you.”

“You wouldn’t?”

“You wouldn’t kiss me either.”

Knox looked away then, at the sun shining through the buildings, the honking of cars and screaming of the voices in the city. People walking and joking and living. He didn’t know what had come over him. He still hated the man next to him. Still abhorred everything he stood for and everything he was.

“No, I wouldn’t.”

“You don’t have to tell me something I already knew.” Charlie was still driving precariously, the streets zipping past them at a still alarming rate. He was worried that they were never going to get to his apartment, and he’d be strewn across the side of the street with Charlie, left to be nibbled on by the rats and photographed as some sick art exhibition.

His place was soon, which was more than good. The car was suffocating, swallowing him whole, possibly never spitting him out.

“This is you, right?” Charlie pulled over, the building long and dark before them.

“Yeah.” Knox nodded, tripping over himself to get out.

Charlie grabbed his forearm before he could get too far though, pulling him back. He was gentle, like he always was. Knox was suddenly back in his seat, staring at the brilliant eyes in front of him. He hated what he was feeling. What this rich, annoying boy with a perfect nose and luxurious fashion sense doing to him? *Nothing* . Absolutely *nothing* . Nothing?

“See you never.” Charlie smiled, his eyes flickered momentarily to Knox’s lips, and Knox felt himself drift away.

“See you never.” Knox could barely hear himself he sounded so breathless. This was going to be the last time. He couldn’t keep running into him, feeling these various treacherous things. He only loved one person, and that was all he could ever do. He was anxious to ever see him again, if on the slim chance his feet fell out from underneath him and he actually did something incredibly stupid like kiss him. Or think about kissing him again, like he was doing now. He hated him! He did! He was rude, and pushy, and too much of a person to spend time with.

Knox got out quickly, rushing back to his apartment. He needed to get away from everything. He needed to see his friends for lunch. He needed to text Chris. Everything was happening too fast. The world was spinning. He was angry and felt warm in the face, and all he could do was type out two measly messages.

To: Chris

I hope your flight goes well. Say hi to Ginny. Text me when you land. I love you.

To: Todd

I’m having a crisis. An actual one, I promise. How soon can you come over?

Chapter End Notes

THANK YOU ALL SOSOOOO much for the love on this. my dears!!! <3333

here comes your ghost again

Chapter Summary

> Charlie meets up with Neil to discuss some problems he's been having. Neil has a surprise.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Once Charlie had pulled away from the Brooklyn apartment, he drove quickly to Manhattan, forgoing any rules that could possibly rule as a hindrance to his fast driving. He practically threw the valet at his apartment the keys, quickly racing inside and into the elevator. He had to change. He had to get out of these clothes and see Neil. Neil seemed to be the only person in the city that understood him. That he was sometimes the only one that truly understood what it was like to conform so much it nearly killed you.

Frantically pulling out his phone, Charlie decided to skip a text message and go straight to call, frantically pushing buttons and throwing down bags as he changed out of his current clothes into something more comfortable. *When flying, always wear a nice suit.* His father's words flowed briefly through his mind as he pulled on a hoodie that read Yale, a pair of jeans flying on shortly afterwords. In the short time it had taken Charlie to change, Neil had answered quietly.

"Neil!" Charlie pounced as soon as he'd heard the line had picked up. "I need to talk to you. Something dastardly is happening to me."

"Did you just get in?"

"I'm back. I need to see you. When is your nearest availability?"

“I’m a working actor now. I’m always free, Dalton.”

“I’ll be over in ten minutes.”

“Why don’t I come to yours?”

“It’s stifling here.” He replied, the unfilled, hollow, white walls of his apartment glaring back at him for what felt like eternity.

“Well, come on over, chap. I’ve actually got pretty great news to tell you, aside from all the hell I’ve been going through as of late.” He tried to huff out a laugh, but Charlie knew that it was more than it seemed.

“Don’t go anywhere.”

“I’ll wait for you.”

“I’ll start making some lunch. Have you eaten?”

“I don’t know if I can right now, but I’ll work up an appetite by the time I’m there.” Charlie was hurling himself into the elevator, having locked his penthouse and dropped things all over the floor as he’d gone, being careful to lock up the one place that was somehow his only home. He was the only person ever there, and due to its size, it often collected more dust than anything else. His parties were lavish, his taste was certainly lavish, but he couldn’t seem to try anything else.

Lavish. The word curdled like sour milk in his brain as he hailed a cab, waving off the doorman who usually did it for him. Saying Neil's address, the driver zoomed even more quickly than Charlie had been driving that morning. He looked into his wallet, finding he only had 100 dollar bills. Rich. Being rich did not make him egotistical and rude, as he was sure Knox thought of him. He didn't even know him! And Knox certainly didn't know anything about his personal life, so he wasn't sure why he cared so much.

Why did he care so much! It was a ridiculous notion, to be thinking of Knox so often and for so long after each encounter. It was quite horrendous every time, and even more so now that the girl who had been keeping him from kissing him in Hawaii was his fiancee. His fiancee was Chris Noel! Chris fucking Noel! He shook his head, the thoughts building up like a ball of yarn. He needed to talk to Neil before he went too ballistic, before he said or tried or did anything stupid.

Arriving at Neil's wasn't unlike any other time. He was buzzed inside, scaling three rickety flights before landing inside of Neil's apartment. Neil could certainly afford a larger place, and had had a brilliant place near Charlie's before he had decided to quit, finally taking an opportunity to seize the day and not care about his father's words any longer. Charlie was proud of him. He had money to last awhile with his newest job (at a coffee place near his apartment) and enough to last him through however many auditions he didn't get as he started out. And if worst came to worst, Charlie would always be more than happy to lend him anything he needed, even if the boisterous man knew that Neil would never accept such an offer. It wasn't his character.

"Charlie!" Neil was beaming as he always was, but there was something about the large grin that let Charlie know that he was not just seeing Neil be incredibly happy about seeing him (as he often was) but something else was going on.

"Neil!" Charlie smiled back, giving him a hug. "How are you? What's new?"

“You first!” He allowed, stepping towards the couch, which was quite near the door. “You wanted to see me. I assume it’s important. Dreadfully.”

“It is, but whatever you have to say I want to hear first. You’re beaming like a firework on the fourth of July, Perry.”

“I booked a job. A real job. My first ever paid acting job. And I got a contract! I went to an open call, and they liked me so much that I got it!”

“Holy shit!” Charlie suddenly found that maybe his own problems weren’t even worthy of talking about. A guy he’d known three separate times versus his best friend’s first ever real acting job? They paled in comparison. “I’m so proud of you, Neil. Holy shit!” He found that the grin that was upon Neil’s face was now upon his own too, and the joy was wrapping around them like a house on fire.

“The writer of the show, I actually met him awhile ago, and he said that he was having his first ever round of auditions for a play he wrote. I mean… I’ve known him for... but I had no idea that he wrote plays. He said he’d encourage the producers to have a good look at me, and they liked me enough that I just kept coming back. I told him it was sort of wrong to use my advantage of knowing him like that, but he insisted I come in for it, and they all agreed that I was best for it. Can you believe it, Charlie? I mean, can you really believe it?”

“Of course I can believe it, Neil. What’s the writer’s name? I’ll have to send him my gratitude for making you the star you were always born to be.”

“His name’s Todd. Todd Anderson.” It was at this moment then that

Charlie noticed a few changes about Neil, and Neil's apartment. It was a little messier than he normally kept it, flannels strewn around various chairs and books kept in stacks around the bookshelf, not placed neatly by it. There were a few dishes in the sink, and the door to his bedroom was a tad ajar. Neil still had his pajamas on, and it was nearly eleven. Neil was a morning person. What had changed in the time that Charlie had been gone? What had changed in the last few months?

"What?" Another voice, one Charlie certainly didn't recognize, called out. A blond head poked out of Neil's bedroom door, a t-shirt and green flannel hanging loosely on the boy who had blond hair that was a little too long and jeans that looked messy. Neil's eyes widened as did Todd's at the sight of someone else in the space that was clearly very sacred to them both, and Charlie exhaled loudly, a relief flooding him.

"Oh. Uh," He straightened, "Uh, I… I uh, well, I… I should be going. I have to meet a friend for lunch. He's having some sort of crisis, I guess. I'm uh… uh…" The stammering was hindering the boy from saying much else, and Charlie thought he was adorable. He had red socks on and was pulling shoes from a little pile on the floor by Neil's bedroom door as he continued miserably to try to speak.

"Charlie," Neil's face was red. He was embarrassed. Charlie was quite open about his relationships with people, with men, women, with anyone that so much as gave him the time of day. He loved people, and he loved people's bodies. Neil had always dated girls in the past, an appeal to his father, Charlie had always been sure. The tension between the two and Neil's reddening neck were the answers to his questions.

"You going to introduce me?"

"Uh, yeah! Yeah, sure! Sure!" Neil stood, fumbling with his hands and wiping his hands on his thighs. "This is Todd Anderson."

“Uh, hello. Hi.” Todd fretted openly, pressing his palms to his thighs to wipe them before he extended his hand to Charlie to shake.

“So you’re the infamous Todd that’s going to make my best friend famous?” Charlie smirked, feeling wonderful before him. He liked him desperately.

“I hope so. I mean, he’s everything to me.” The words tumbled out so quickly, Charlie wasn’t sure he had caught them.

“How long have you known each other?” He asked, turning to Neil, who was bright red from the compliment.

“A few months.”

“Six.” Todd corrected, finding some sort of voice. “I’d known him for four weeks before I asked him out officially.”

“You’ve been hiding this from me for six months?”

Neil paled. “Well, you got so weird after your trip to Hawaii, and then I got busy with work, and I realized that I had to quit, and life happened, and then Todd happened, and everything was so perfect and beautiful that I was terrified I was going to mess it all up if I said anything.”

Charlie couldn’t help the laugh that flew from his lips. “I love you Neil, but you’re crazy.”

Todd smiled then, “I told you he’d be cool about it.”

Neil only seemed to get redder, looking down at his blue socks. “I’m sorry I never said anything Charlie, it’s just…”

“All that Catholic guilt and whatnot.” Charlie joked, a smile on his lips. “I’m happy for you both, really. What’s up with your friend, Todd?”

“I think he’s probably just being dramatic. He keeps running into this guy and he always says it’s ruining his life, but I think he’s just got a crush on him. Or maybe it’s because he’s going to be getting married soon.”

“Jeez. Sounds like a mess.”

“It’s always something only I can fix.” Todd laughed, a little breathless. “Our other friends would be of no help. The Catholic guilt and all.”

Charlie laughed, hard and honest. “I like you, kid.”

“Well, I’ll let you all say goodbye. Your porch still open for smokes?”

“Only if you brought your own. I quit.” Neil said quickly, “I only did it when I was drunk anyways.”

“He’s changing you. Finally!” The joke rolled off Charlie’s tongue, and everybody laughed before Charlie meandered into Neil’s kitchen. He didn’t want to smoke if Neil had quit. It didn’t seem quite right.

By the time Neil had come back a few moments later, he was in a haze that Charlie had never seen him in. His best friend was in love.

“So you kept that a secret for six months?”

“I’m sorry. Really. I just… I was really fucking terrified.”

“You don’t have to explain it to me.”

“I know. I just feel bad for not saying anything. But it’s not about me. What’s wrong with you?”

“Something’s happening to me.”

“What?” A curt laugh left Neil’s lips.

“There’s this… Neil, I don’t even know. I think it’s fate.”

“What is?’

“I keep running into this guy. College, Hawaii, the airport today. I keep running into him, and I just… something happens to me when I’m around him.”

“You’re in love?”

“No, I’m… I don’t know what I am. But I feel so… well, you remember how I was when I got back from Hawaii.”

“Unresponsive, yeah.”

“He drove me home from college that one year but… I don’t know. Something always happens when we’re together. I can’t explain it.”

“You have to give me more context here. What happens?”

“It’s like the world stops spinning and all I can think about his lips on mine. But the worst part of it all is that I hate him. He’s annoying, and I despise being around him. But at the same time I find myself wanting to run off to a place where nobody knows who we are. It makes no sense.”

“It does to me. You’re in love.”

“No, I’m not.”

“You must be. Every time I see Todd, it’s like the world stops and we’re only made for each other.”

“You and Todd are different. You’re in love. I’m not.”

“You might be.”

“You’re being unhelpful.”

“You wanted my advice.”

“I love you, even if you’re dumb. I’m sure you’ll see him again. And if you don’t, what’s the big deal? It’s not like you’re in love with him or anything.”

“Remind me why I keep coming back to you.”

“Because you love me.” Neil grinned, and that halo he was wearing earlier was still set on his head. He was happy. Charlie grinned. Maybe he could just forget about all of it. Something in the back of his mind, despite all odds, told him that he didn’t want to. He wanted to keep remembering Knox Overstreet, even if he hated him.

Chapter End Notes

taps mic... hi... is anybody out there??? sorry it's been 100 years since i've done anything around these parts. school is wild!

tonight you're on my mind

Chapter Summary

> Knox has Todd over to talk about his predicaments of the morning's commute. He needs somebody.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Todd looked out the window as the subway lurched to Knox's place, feeling a warmth spreading in his chest. He loved Neil. Truly and honestly, he was in love with him. He knew that Neil had been anxious for him to meet Charlie, but Todd had secretly wanted to for months. He knew that Neil was a fragile person, someone that was often unsure of himself and the people around him. But, as he looked down at his phone, he felt all those worries he always harbored for his lover fade the smallest bit.

Neil

I hope you liked him. He can be a little much.

I love you.

Todd

I love the people that you love <3

I love you too. :)

The subway lurched into Brooklyn, and Todd got off with various other people, walking the streets he knew well to Knox's place.

As soon as he'd buzzed, Knox had come to fetch him at a speed that could only be known as astronomical. "Todd," He said breathlessly, leading him up the rickety stairs to his apartment. "Todd, I'm serious,

this is going very poorly."

Todd couldn't help the laugh that escaped his lips as he trudged up the precarious stairs. Knox was the hopeless romantic of the group, but he was always being quite dramatic about everything that happened to him.

"Well good day to you too."

"Sorry," Knox shook his head, "It's been a crazy morning."

"How's Chris?"

"Perfect, yeah. Saw her off this morning. That's why I texted."

"I figured. Who'd you run into at the airport?" Knox opened his door, stepping over a pair of pink slippers as he did so, guiding Todd inside.

Todd looked around the apartment. He knew it wasn't his place to ask, but it had always been strange to him that Knox and Chris still didn't live together. They spent copious time at each other's places, as was evident from the art hanging around Knox's walls, but it still didn't make any sense to him. Of course, he kept all opinions to himself (and well, to a group chat that Knox wasn't in).

"Remember the guy who we saw in Hawaii? And the guy who I had to drive home from college?"

"The hot one?"

“What?”

“From Hawaii?” Todd took his shoes off, sinking into Knox’s luxurious couch. His apartment was much nicer than the exterior of it gave way.

“I’m sorry, I’m confused.”

“The hot one from Hawaii. I thought you were going to…” His voice trailed off, and Todd found himself laughing again. “Look, you’re an open book, Overstreet. Always worn your heart on your sleeve.”

“I guess.”

“It’s true.” Todd nodded, “You’re terrible about it. We were all confused because as soon as you walked away, you were talking to him in the corner with those eyes you get when you and Chris get drunk at Pitts’s apartment.”

“Well, whatever.”

“It’s not whatever, look… I got off track. What’s the deal?”

Knox looked up at the ceiling, sinking his head back into the couch. He felt overwhelmed. “I saw him today, at the airport. I keep running into him.”

“So?”

“He talked to me today. And Chris. I guess he knows her cause of her career, you know. But it just… he drove me back into the city and I felt like I was drowning, Todd. I think I’m just getting cold feet. About the wedding and all. But I look at him and it’s like… oh, hell. I don’t know what it’s like. But it feels like deep, scary water. Muddy.”

“You’re attracted to him. Clearly.”

“That’s the point,” Knox felt his eyes fill up with tears. Hot and mean, they threatened to spill over as he kept his focus on the popcorned ceiling. “I don’t know what to do about it.”

“You hate him though, right?”

“Obviously. But it’s complicated, I guess.”

“Will you ever see him again?”

“No.”

“Then don’t worry about it, okay?”

“Okay,” Knox said softly, the tears brimming in his eyes as he looked up from his seat next to Todd.

“C’mere,” Todd pulled his friend close, closing the space on the couch

between them. Knox began to cry as he pulled him in; big, loud tears. “You’re gonna be okay, Knoxie.”

“I’m sorry,”

“Don’t apologize.” Todd placed his arms around him, patting his head carefully. It reminded him of high school, when Knox had cried into his arms the same way on Todd’s dorm room bed the night he'd told everybody that he liked men. That he liked women too. He was tired of fighting with himself. Todd was tired of Knox having to keep fighting so harshly against himself. “Want me to talk?”

“Yeah,” Knox nodded, the words mangled.

Knox liked to hear people talk when he was in a place so vulnerable as he was now in Todd’s arms. Talking always got his mind off of whatever was in front of him. It wasn’t as scary if somebody was with him when he was like this.

“Well, I went to Neil’s last night. I’m really falling in love with him. Then to my surprise, he had a friend come over! I was thrown off, as I hadn’t expected any company…”

Chapter End Notes

school blegghhh writing on breaks yayyyy. thank you for all the love mwuahhhhh

makes me so unsure of myself

Chapter Summary

> Neil and Todd make a landmark discovery. And shit- now they've got to tell Charlie. Knox can wait a little longer, can't he?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

New Group Chat Started with: Todd Anderson, Neil Perry, Gerard Pitts, Stephens Meeks, and Richard Cameron.

Todd

Gay people… I got some baddd news.

Cameron

Bi erasure… screaming crying throwing up

Gerard

What!!!!!!!

Neil

Did you just realize what I just realized…

Meeks

What? PS Hey Neil! :)

Neil

Hey!

Todd

Knox is currently sleeping on his sofa and anybody else remember the day he came out in high school? He’s suffering like that but worse

Gerard

What? Why?????

Todd

He is in love with Neil’s best friend… but he hates him.

Cameron

You lost me

Todd

The guy from Hawaii? The guy he bitched about driving to NYC after college?

Meeks

NO way in hell omg…

Cameron

SHUT UP NOOO WAY!!! I remember that guy!!! HE'S SO HOT!!!

Todd

It's true. That guy is Charlie Dalton, Neil's bff since they were like 7?

Neil

6

Gerard

Well this is a lot to unpack on a Saturday morning at 10AM.

Neil

Who has time for coming to my apartment?

Cameron

For what?

Todd

We gotta talk about this, like, seriously.

Neil

I gotta think of something to tell Charlie.

Cameron

Aren't we going to tell them?

Todd

I think that'll put Knox into a coma.

Gerard

Fair. Neil - bring Charlie. Come to our apartment.

Neil

You don't want to come to mine?

Meeks

Ours is bigger. Plus, we got our sculpture back and want everyone to see it.

Cameron

Oh my god is it of you two naked???

Gerard

Can't stand you… It's obviously me holding the most important thing in the world to me.

Meeks

It's our hands holding each other's hand Cam

Cameron

I want to see naked people darnnnn :/

Neil

Todd, will Knox be okay by himself for awhile?

Todd

He knows where the meals are. Plus he'll probably be asleep for like six more hours.

Meeks

See you all in 30.

"Who are you texting?" Charlie grinned, looking over at Neil from his place on the couch. He was watching some news program, but clearly wasn't paying attention, as he had been looking over at the measly window every few moments. He couldn't see anything apart from a few buildings.

"Todd. You feel like going on an adventure?"

"What do you have in mind?" Charlie briefly let his mind whirl to college, when adventures were much more than they had ever been at Welton. Neil and himself had spent years suffering there, trying to figure out how to keep above it all. The most they'd ever done there was smoke a cigarette and sneak around after hours. They'd never been together to party in college. Neil had gone to NYU, Charlie to Northwestern.

"Todd's friends' place."

“Why?”

“We’ve got news.”

“You’re setting me up with someone.”

“I’m not. You can be sure of that.”

“I don’t believe you. Where do they live?”

“Manhattan.”

“Not far. Let’s go.”

“You aren’t going to ask me anything else?” Neil furrowed his brow, looking carefully at him.

“You’re my best friend. I’m inclined to trust you. Plus, I had a weird day today.”

“It’s not even noon. It could get worse.”

“I trust you.” Charlie nodded, pulling together his things and following Neil out of the door. He did trust him, that much was true. However, his mind was still occupied with the morning. What it all meant, if it was supposed to mean anything at all. Probably not. But if it did, Charlie wasn’t sure what he wanted to do with all of that. If he could do anything with it at all. To distract himself from his own

mind, he asked Neil what Todd was like, wanting to get his mind off of everything.

Neil began to talk, about how they met, about how he was pretty sure it was love at first sight, about how he loved him. How he'd been waiting for a guy like this his whole life. How he felt like everything stopped when they were together. The world could collapse in on itself and he wouldn't be any the wiser. It was gorgeous. All of it. The words spilling out of his mouth were nothing inherently special, but they were poetic. It was beautiful, gorgeous poetry.

Soon, Neil was leading him out of the subway and they were walking towards Todd's friends's apartment, who lived together in a nice part of Manhattan. As they got seemingly farther and farther from their subway exit, Charlie laughed slightly.

"What?"

"You ever been here?"

"Not yet. I've been to Cameron's, his other friend. But this address says it's a brownstone."

"Well shit, if I knew I was going to be around company, I'd have cleaned up."

"They don't live with their parents."

"What do they do?"

“I have no idea. Something with computers, I think.”

“Well, you couldn’t explain what I do, and you did it for awhile.”

“I was a terrible asset. I had to quit.”

“Obviously. This it?”

The brownstone before them was gorgeous. It had a little dinosaur shaped mailslot, and Charlie smiled instantly. Whoever these two were, he liked them.

“Neil!” Todd came through the door of the place, socks adorning his feet as he looked between the two. He was beaming. “Hey, Charlie.”

“Hey everybody!” A tall, brown haired guy called from inside, and Charlie followed Neil like a dutiful pupil, taking his shoes off as he stepped inside the green colored place. There were plants everywhere, and green wallpaper covered the walls in a swirling, 70s sort of pattern.

“This is Charlie.” Neil offered, placing a hand on Charlie’s back as he showed him to the little group.

The little group consisted of Todd, whom he had met earlier only briefly; a tall, brown-haired boy with long hair; a red-haired boy with glasses, and one without. The little group looked kind of funny as they waved to him, grins on all of their faces. As Todd began to introduce everybody, Charlie felt himself float away.

“This is Gerard Pitts, Stephen Meeks, and Richard Cameron.”

“Everybody just calls me Cameron.” He winked, a laugh escaping his lips.

Charlie looked at the group and furrowed his brow. “Jesus. I’m having the worst deja vu right now.”

“You’re not. Not really, at least.”

“Cameron!”

“Aw, why ease into it, Pittsie?”

Charlie felt like the floor was falling out from underneath him as he looked between all of them.

“Do you want to sit down?” The one named Meeks asked him, and Charlie found himself nodding as Cameron continued to talk.

“We have met before. In Hawaii. Like a year ago? About?”

“Holy shit. Holy shit…”

“Yeah, I made the connection this morning.” Todd said, sitting next to him and putting a hand on his back. It was a very Neil sort of gesture, and Charlie could immediately tell why they got along so well. “First off, the guy who you keep running into is named Knox. I mean,

Charlie is pretty usual, so I didn't really think that much about it. But then I saw you this morning, and I recognized you from the bar that night. I asked Neil what his name was, and he said Knox."

"You're kidding me, right?" Charlie looked up to Neil, vulnerable and slightly uncomfortable around all of the people he'd never really met before.

"I'm sorry."

"Knox, our best friend, is the guy who you keep running into. The guy who you hate, I guess." Cameron added, shrugging his shoulders as Meeks pushed him with his elbow.

"Can we get you anything? Like a water or something?" Gerard asked, looking carefully at him.

"Uh, water." Charlie put his face in his hands, sighing loudly. "Thanks."

"I'm sorry, Charlie. I just realized it this morning, and I never thought… well, I never thought you'd have to see him again. I realized it all too late. I never meant to…" Todd's voice trailed off, and he stared blankly at him.

"You don't have to apologize to me, kid." Charlie waved him off, "I need a minute."

"We have a bathroom I can show you to." Stephen said, "Follow me."

“That’d be nice.”

Charlie felt like he was underwater. The guy whom he had spent the entire morning trying to forget, had spent the last four years of his life trying to forget, was now going to be in his life for the next few years. Or forever. He couldn’t even begin to think of how long Todd and Neil were going to be together.

“I grabbed some water for you.” Gerard said, coming around the corner from what was assumedly the kitchen.

“Thanks,” Charlie felt like he was slurring his words, like he was drunk.

“Here we are.”

“Thanks,” He repeated, as he felt it was the only thing he could say before he went completely ballistic. “Who lives here, by the way?”

“We do.”

“It’s gorgeous. Love what you’ve done with the place, really.”

Gerard, the much taller of the two, laughed despite Stephen’s worried face. “Thanks. We tried to spruce it up.” He looked down at the shorter man, and placed an arm around his waist. As Charlie noticed the matching rings on their fingers, he felt himself tumbling into the bathroom.

Sighing quite dramatically, even by his own standards, Charlie looked around at bathroom. It was dinosaur themed, and the little red t-rexes seemed to be laughing at him as he sat on the floor, willing himself not to cry. Why was he going to cry?

He took a sip of the water, looking up at the ceiling, covered in a tacky wallpaper with various dinosaurs. It reminded him of a child's doctor's office. He was panicking, to say the least. *Knox Overstreet*. His number one public enemy and the guy he'd had one too many dreams about was going to be in his life for a long time now. He was probably going to have to go to his wedding to Chris Noel. *Chris Noel*?! Everything felt like it was spinning.

Charlie wasn't used to denying his attraction to people so vehemently. He was always a person that could get what he wanted when he wanted it. He was someone who knew exactly how he felt about people the moment he met them. He was not someone who sulked in the bathroom because he found out that someone attractive was going to be in his life much longer. But he hated Knox! The stupid little nose, the bangs. The way he was stubborn.

Unsure of everything, including his own feelings, Charlie pulled himself up, splashing some cold water on his face. He couldn't let that face go, no matter how much ice cold water crippled through his fingers. The brown eyes; the way he had a comforting presence, like he could stop time if he willed it. If he kept thinking about it, he'd get lost in all of it. And right now, Charlie couldn't do that. He had to figure out how to move on. He had to figure out what he was going to say when they inevitably pulled Knox from some closet somewhere.

Gathering what little dignity and will he had left, Charlie exited the bathroom to the front living room he'd been in previously to find everybody sitting around.

"I think it's a good sculpture, I said that! I just think it would be so much funnier if it was of you guys naked."

“Cam,” Todd’s voice stopped the other red head from talking.

“I like you. I’ve liked you since the day I met you.” Charlie said to him, walking back into the room.

“I’m irresistible, ‘s why.”

“Don’t mind Cameron. He’s an asshole.” Todd shook his head as Neil went to him.

“Are you okay?”

“How many more surprises you got for me today, Perry? I don’t know how many more of these I can take.”

“That’s all. I promise.”

“Knox here?”

“He’s still asleep on my couch.” Todd answered.

“Any particular reason?”

“He’d probably die from the shock.”

“Makes two of us, I guess.”

“I should probably introduce myself more. I think we’re probably going to be spending a lot more time together.” Cameron spoke up, surprising no one.

Charlie nodded, turning towards him. They were going to be spending more time together. Everybody was. These groups were going to meld, and somewhere at the center of all of it would be himself and Knox. A horrifying, terrible, sinister, passionate, wonderful thought.

Chapter End Notes

> oooooo m g!!!!! having so much fun writing this. hope 2 update soon again but school is literally killing me and i so wish that this was a joke that i'm typing out!! sending all my troopers still reading this a kiss and hug <33333

tired of staring into the sun

Chapter Summary

> Knox learns something that may forever alter his life. How could Todd keep that from him?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It was two more weeks before anybody in the group could say anything to the other involved parties.

“Knox!” Neil smiled, opening his door to Knox and Todd, the pair having been invited over for lunch.

Knox was nervous, to say the least. He hadn’t yet met Neil, but Todd had talked nonstop about him for quite awhile. He loved him, and Knox was just worried that Neil wouldn’t like him. That he’d fall over his feet too much and falter and somehow embarrass one of his oldest friends.

Those fears were stopped quickly as the boy across the doorway beamed gayily at him. Neil was, as he knew, full of life. Exuberant. Joyful. Kind. He was unlike anyone Todd claimed to have ever met, he’d said. By the way he was looking at him, Knox was pretty sure that much was true. The doorway opened to a quite small apartment. In that case, it was much like Knox’s own.

A second later, he was being engulfed into a hug. “I’m so happy to finally meet you, Knox!” Neil was beaming against him. He could feel it. “I’ve met all of Todd’s other wonderful friends, but we keep missing each other. No more!”

Knox laughed, pulling away. He felt his face grow red with the attention. Todd and he grinned at each other; a private moment in an open space.

“Well, come on in. Don’t be shy.”

The little huddle all came into the open space. He could see the kitchen from the sofa from the little kitchen table. It was homey. Books were littered around the place. There was a poster of Laurence Olivier on the wall. A few photographs of himself and what appeared

to be friends. There was an orange cat sitting on the windowsill.

“Make yourself at home. I hate to work, but I have to ask Todd a couple of things for the production.” Neil turned away from him, his eyes moving to Todd. They shared a smile before Todd started fumbling around with his bag he’d brought along, pulling out pieces of paper and little books.

“No worries,” Knox smiled.

“There’s stuff to drink in the fridge. Feel free to take whatever you’d like.”

They disappeared behind one of the doors in the apartment, the other leading to what Knox could only assume was the bathroom. Finding himself a bit hopeless, he settled into the couch. A very tattered copy of Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein was on the desk, post-it notes sticking out of it haphazardly. Knox had a brief thought that the two were destined for each other.

He knew they wouldn’t be working for too long, so he chose to wait to grab anything to drink. Instead, he found himself getting up, his eyes lingering over the photographs. There was one of himself and a girl who had brown hair. They were smiling together. His hand was on her thigh and she had her head leaned precariously into his shoulder. It was a little blurry, as whoever had taken it was clearly drunk. There was another photograph of himself with some teenagers that all looked like they were the same age. They were adorning various kinds of costumes, green with little crowns.

Then there was another photograph. One that made his head swim and his stomach clench. He’d just forgotten about the previous encounter, and now here he was. Neil was wrapped around Charlie in the photo, grins on their faces. They were in a booth somewhere at what looked like a bar, with nice sweaters and mugs of beer. Charlie had his arm around Neil’s waist and Neil was leaning against him. They looked cozy. Comfortable with one another. Charlie had a mustache.

Knox was known to be quite overdramatic if and when he needed to be. Upon seeing the photograph, he couldn’t help but grab it. He wanted to believe they were exes, that nothing about them made sense as best friends. But as he looked around, there were photographs of Charlie everywhere. High school graduation, the two as children, the two at parties. They were everywhere, and Knox felt

overwhelmed.

“Todd?” He called, his voice stuck in his throat. “Hey, Todd?”

“Yeah?” Todd opened up the door to Neil’s room, glasses on the bridge of his nose as a pencil stuck out of his mouth. He was holding six or seven pieces of paper, likely doing rewrites. It was at that moment that Knox realized he was still holding the photo of the two of them. “Oh.”

Neil popped his head out a moment later, and the two shared a glance before looking back at Knox. “We wanted to break it to you easy.” Neil offered, “I know you hate him, but he’s my best friend. The only real friend I’ve had through everything.”

“You know him?” Knox felt like the world was spinning. “You know Charlie?”

“Yeah. We went to school together since we were six. I used to work for his company.”

“Holy shit.” He put the photo down, looking desperately to Todd. "Todd?”

“I met him a couple of weeks ago. I know you hate him, but Knox, I promise you… he’s not what you think.”

“How come it took two weeks to tell me?”

“I was worried about you. You were going through hell when you got home.”

“You know Charlie?” He asked again, his head cocked, turned towards Neil.

“Yeah.”

“Can I use your bathroom?”

“Sure,” Neil lent his head to the only other door in his apartment, and Knox padded the few steps to open the door. Gripping the edges of the sink, he felt like his world was floating. He quickly splashed some water on his face, hoping that this sinking feeling in his gut was going to go away.

He turned to look around the little bathroom. On the wall by the door was a picture of Charlie and Neil, smiling brightly. Neil had on some

outrageous eyeliner, and Charlie was grinning madly, an arm around his shoulder. He had a program in his hand, and was wearing a light green suit. It was the color of sea foam green. He had a mustache. He looked like he did that day he'd driven him from the airport. He felt that water pooling in his stomach again, lapping around his head, the edges of his ears filling with it.

"Knox?" Todd's voice came, a knock on the door. "Knox, are you okay?"

"I'm coming," He called, although his voice felt like it wasn't connected to the rest of him. He hated Charlie Dalton. He hated him. But while he hated him, he couldn't deny any longer that there was something there. Some attraction. Something bubbling in the surface. Something that had bubbled the second he'd met him. Because as much as he hated him, as much as he never wanted to see Charlie Dalton again, he couldn't deny a simple fact. Knox Overstreet was a weak man, and Charlie Dalton was gorgeous.

Chapter End Notes

on break baby! will be doing quite a bit of writing. happy holidays to all who celebrate something in december :)

here, but now they're gone

Chapter Summary

Finally, a meeting. It's different than Charlie had expected.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It was another two weeks before anybody got enough time to process what everything really meant. For Charlie, that meant he was simply biding time. Having taken the news about it all a bit more harshly than he would have liked, Charlie set out to try and be excited for Neil, and Neil's friends.

Their first official meeting was to be Meeks and Pitts' anniversary party. They'd been together an obscenely long time, something had been uttered about fourteen. And truthfully, they were very kind people, Charlie couldn't argue that. After he'd had a bit of a meltdown, they'd treated him more than fairly, giving him room and talking to him as if he were one of their friends, and not Knox's biggest enemy.

But despite that, it still took Charlie's breath away when Knox waltzed into the apartment, holding a bundt cake and wearing a pink crewneck.

"Knox!" Todd cried, and then they were hugging each other, holding tightly as they grinned.

"This is for you," He said, holding up the cake to Pitts. "My sisters and I made it."

He looked just as sweet as the cake, but Charlie wasn't about to figure

out where that thought had come from. Noticing him, for possibly the first time, Charlie studied him, unsure of what or how to feel. He was feeling something deep settle into his chest, something that he couldn't name.

"Charlie," Knox greeted, and extended his hand. "Nice to finally meet you."

"We've already met." Charlie said, taking his hand, waiting for the held breath to be let go. Everybody was on edge around the two of them, and it was quite stifling. "Knox."

"You look well."

"You too."

"I'm gonna go put this in the kitchen, babe." Pitts said, and before the air could hang thicker with anything else, Cameron opened up the front door, letting himself in with a flourish.

"We're here!" He all but sang, and then the house erupted into noise as everybody rushed around.

Taking a moment to watch Knox in the hubbub of it all, Charlie watched him look down at his phone, frown, and then proceeded to put his phone back in his pocket. Charlie pocketed that information to himself, curious to use it at a later date.

"No girls with you?" Charlie asked, turning to Cameron, who was pulling off a scarf he was wearing.

“I’m the girlfriend.” A blond guy next to him laughed, pushing his glasses up.

“Oh,” Charlie smiled, “Sorry.”

“No problems. I swing all ways,” Cameron grinned, “I see no one’s killed each other quite yet.”

“Cam,” Todd’s voice rang through the small little area.

“I’m just being myself, like you said.”

“God,” Todd laughed, and the sound seemed to settle quietly over everything, allowing for a calm to fill the air, settling between the cracks in the surface. He leaned onto Neil with the laugh, and Neil soon was laughing too.

“You better be hungry,” Stephen warned, “Ger’s made a feast.”

“You know me, Steve. I’m always hungry.”

“We know, Cam.” Gerard laughed, joining in on the ruckus once again.

Charlie kept to himself for a few more moments, watching quietly and carefully as the group settled together into themselves. The friends were very close, as evident from pictures around the house and by the

way that they talked to one another. He felt like an outsider, and kept to himself through the meal, talking when spoken to or if he was asked a question. It was, quite possibly, one of the few times in his life he'd been nearly silent.

"Baby, come on," Cameron was laughing, and the two were leaving their plates to Neil and Todd who were helping Gerard and Stephen pick up. Knox had excused himself a few moments ago answer a phone call, and so that left Charlie to his own devices. Needing some air, and maybe a smoke (a habit he was still trying to quit), he headed outside, flashing his pack of cigarettes to Neil, who had raised an eyebrow.

"Ok," Knox was a little farther away than Charlie was going to travel for his cigarette, so he lit up on the steps, watching Knox talk by the street lamp before them. "Well, I love you. You know that."

He took a drag, watching as the boy's bangs flew about in the wind, which was still a bit cold for the time of year.

"I know, Chris. I don't care if you have to stay longer. You know that. I just want you to have a good time and be happy. I want you and Ginny to make the best movie ever. I love you."

Charlie blew out the smoke, wondering what the text he'd gotten earlier had meant.

A moment later, Knox had hung up the phone, and took a moment to stare at the people walking and the cars going by in the street. Turning on his heel, it took a second for him to acknowledge Charlie's presence, which made the boy chuckle through his cigarette.

"Calling that girl from the airport?"

“None of your business,” Knox huffed, chagrined that Charlie was blocking the entrance into the brownstone.

“Just asking,” Charlie said, the smoke flying around him.

“Smoking’s bad for you. Makes you smell like shit.”

“None of your business,” He countered.

“Don’t you want to try? For one afternoon to be civil? We can’t keep being assholes to each other.”

“I know,” Charlie answered, the fresh air hitting his face so wonderfully that he closed his eyes.

“Let’s try again, then.”

“Hmm?” Charlie opened his eyes again to meet Knox’s. They were lovely. He’d sat down next to him, extending his hand.

“I’m Knox Overstreet.”

“Charlie Dalton,” Charlie extended his hand, putting his cigarette out with his other hand as he did so. His skin did that same thing it had done when they’d touched briefly that day in Hawaii. He was sweltering with electricity. “Girlfriend troubles? I saw you got a text that seemed worrisome to you earlier.”

“It wasn’t a big deal. She was just drunk. We all get a little overwhelmed when we’re drunk.”

“Were you calling her? Not that it’s my business.”

“Sorry I got so defensive. Yeah, I was.”

“You really love her, don’t you?”

“More than anything.”

More than anything rang in the air as Charlie found their eyes slipping down each other’s bodies, analyzing. He didn’t know what it meant, but he hadn’t been so turned on in a long time. Overstreet had some sort of weird power over him.

“What was it about?”

“Just wanted to ramble. Likes to ramble when she’s drunk. I do too, ‘swhy we’re a good pair.”

“Is she making a movie?”

“Yeah,” He nodded, and Charlie could tell that there was something more than what he was saying. “It’s a romance. Her best friend Ginny is directing it and starring in it alongside her. It’s a brilliant script. It’s going to make them stars.”

“You sound nervous about something.”

Knox stiffened with the words, turning back to face Charlie. “I’m not. And it wouldn’t be any of your business if I am.”

“So you are.”

Knox licked his lips, huffing in frustration. His eyes fell onto Charlie’s lips, and before either could say anything in retaliation, Neil popped his head out of the door.

“Come on in, guys! It’s getting cold.”

Knox didn’t say anything as he hopped up, and Charlie took his sweet time, rising to his feet.

“Did you do something I wouldn’t have?” Neil asked, worry rising within him. He wanted today to go well.

“I was a gentleman. Tried and true.”

“Alright,” Neil smirked, and the two followed behind Knox as they came back inside. Knox looked a little disheveled from his phone call, but Charlie chose not to bring it up with Gerard and Stephen so intrigued upon a game of charades. There was a clenching feeling Charlie had about the guy in pink, but he couldn’t quite put a finger on it. And surely, it was bound to bother him for months to come. He’d been bothered by him since the drive from Chicago.

Chapter End Notes

me when I am alive and posting and no one will care but swag

before you know the one

Chapter Summary

> Knox realizes something monumental. Charlie's there to catch him.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

There was too much happening in Knox Overstreet's brain that he was almost certain another six months without Chris were going to be too many. And of course, he only needed one anniversary party for Pitts and Meeks to feel absolutely insane about his whole arrangement. He and Chris didn't live together, they didn't have too many similar interests, and yet, they were getting married. They spent long periods of time at each other's homes, but had never fully moved in together. In fact, they hadn't even talked about moving in together. They were getting married, but they'd barely talked about it.

Fearing that he was being irrational, as he sometimes got about Chris, Knox did the only thing that he thought made sense in a situation so dire: text Todd.

Knox

I am having a crisis.

Todd

?

Knox

It's about Chris

Todd

You're always having a crisis about Chris :/

Knox

But it's serious this time. Promise.

Todd

I'm free later

Knox

Are you free now?

Todd

That depends. Charlie's here.

Knox

I'm in such a bad way that I'm going to come over.

Todd

Are you sure?

Knox

New year, new me.

Knox bristled at the thought of Charlie being around while he spilled his most intimate secrets about his relationship to Todd, but desperate measures were being called to. It wasn't too late, around seven, so perhaps the night would wind down enough so that he could get Todd alone. He needed his best friend more than anything right now, and he knew Todd would be gracious enough to oblige.

As he flew past the familiar streets, Knox felt a hard piece settle deep into his stomach. He was eager to spill his guts to Todd, to open up and stretch them all over the kitchen floor. He was sick with something, and he didn't know what it was. He tried to relax as the calming voices of the Beatles sang into his headphones, but it didn't help much. It only made him think of Chris, how she thought his taste was a little too dated. He wasn't much into the music she reviewed, which was newer, indie sort of things. He knew that he was a simple guy, as he'd been told many times by both her and Ginny; but he liked songs about love, not heartbreak. He liked to be mellow, he liked the color pink, and he liked his family.

It wasn't long after Todd opened his door to him that he could hear the other two, babbling away. He must have looked worse than he intended, as Todd kind of went slack-jawed at the sight of him. Fumbling with his headphones, he had not-so gracefully shoved them into his pocket as he looked at Todd, who had his head cocked.

He had a pen in his right hand, signaling that he'd been inspired to write something down. Neil was laughing on his couch, and Charlie was grinning from his spot on the floor, placing a card down.

"We're just playing cards and having some drinks. What's the matter?"

"It's Chris."

“Chris Noel?”

Knox turned to Charlie, who had a flushed face despite the cool of Todd’s apartment. He liked to keep the place cold, as it saved money.

“What’s the matter, Knox?” Todd asked again, a hand on his back, some sort of steading device.

“I just…” His eyes were on Neil and Charlie, clearly a bit uncomfortable to talk about his current situation around people he didn’t know as well.

“It’s fine,” Todd nodded, “They’re both a bit tipsy.”

“Sorry I came so quickly, then. I just…”

Todd didn’t need to be told that Knox was uncomfortable with the situation. Leading him a bit away from Charlie and Neil, it was easy for Knox to open right up, showing all his innards. He was tearing up as he spoke, and it felt like everything was raining down. His insecurities, the way he always felt less than to Chris, her popularity. She had never done anything to him to indicate that she had done nothing but love him, and although he knew it was true, he couldn’t help but feel insecure.

“Knox,” Todd was worried immediately, understandably so. There wasn’t enough room for privacy at the state of his outburst, and he could already hear the other two in the room across, whispering.

“I know. Sorry,” Knox shifted, “I just… I don’t know. I’m sorry.”

“Yes, you do. What’s the matter?”

“I’m getting it again.”

“Getting what?” Charlie, who had entered the kitchen, was holding Neil, who was clinging hazardously to his waist. Knox didn’t look up, staring at the ground so intently that holes could bore into it. He didn’t think he could stand here and talk about anything with Charlie around. He would probably just cry harder.

“Neil,” Todd tried, but everybody seemed rooted to the kitchen, unmoving.

“You getting cold feet?” Charlie asked, so out of the blue and thick in the air that Knox felt like he would drown in his tears.

“Knox,” Todd said his name again, trying to ground him.

“No,” Knox shook his head, finally finding some words. “He’s right. I am. I’m fucking freezing. Chris is going to be filming for another six months which I just found out today, and I’m so happy for her. You know that. She knows that! But I just… it’s been building up, I guess. We don’t live together. We never have, and we’ve been dating for so long. We don’t like the same things. I never know what she’s talking about, it seems. She’s so much smarter and better than I am, and I just… I don’t know. We’ve never even talked about what we want at the wedding. We’ve barely talked about the engagement. We keep putting things off. She’s so busy. I’m just… what if she doesn’t want to marry me? I love her, but what if that isn’t enough?” He was spewing, talking so quickly that he figured the two tipsy ones wouldn’t pick up on it.

“Knox, you are enough. More than. She loves you.” It felt like Todd wanted to say something else, like *‘but she just doesn’t love you enough to marry you* .’ But he kept it to himself, which only worsened Knox’s state.

“You don’t always have to like everything your partner does.” Neil agreed, shaking his head, contributing despite his stumbling feet. “I don’t like *The Great Gatsby* movies, but Todd loves them. And I still love him, despite that.”

“It depends, though. Sometimes you just have too little in common for it to be worth it.” Charlie added, looking at Knox squarely. Through his tears, and his beating heart, Knox felt like he was looking at him for the first time, like that night in the hotel all those years ago, when they’d taken too long looking.

“Opposites attract, Charlie.”

“Sure,” Charlie agreed, “But that doesn’t mean it works. I enjoy liking similar things as my partners. It gives you an opportunity to talk.” He shifted, and Knox could tell immediately that while his cheeks were flushed, he wasn’t really tipsy at all. “I thought you would be into the same stuff, though. She’s always writing about really underground, up and coming stuff.”

“Do you listen to that kind of stuff?” Todd asked, trying to get the eyes off of Knox.

“No,” He grinned, “Every once in awhile. But nobody today really looks like Jim Morrison, so I’m not as interested.”

“He’s hot, yeah.” Neil nodded, hanging onto Charlie like a koala.

“Exactly,” Knox found himself, for once in his life, agreeing with Charlie. That was dangerous water, and he was angry that he’s been witness to his current predicament, but there was nothing he could do. “I just… I’m too much of a hopeless romantic, I guess. She doesn’t like that sometimes. A bit helicopter parenting, I guess. I just… I don’t know. Maybe I’m in my head.”

“No,” Todd shook his head, “She loves you.”

“But what?”

“Hm?”

“You want to say something else.”

“Knox,” Todd sighed, “This is going to break your heart. She loves you, but I don’t know if it’s enough to do that for forever.”

“It’s like that song,” Neil offered, singing an off-key, very pitchy version of The Beatles “She Loves You.” Then he started babbling about which Beatle he thought was the most attractive. Nobody was paying him much kind, though.

“It’s nothing like that.” Knox felt like no one was listening to him. He needed advice on how to mend what was breaking. He didn’t have time to fly to see her, to patch anything up. “I just… I love her, and I guess I don’t know if it’s enough. Is it not enough? Am I not doing enough?”

“No, I just don’t know if her heart is in the same place as yours.”

Neil burst into song again, something he was making up himself, and Todd turned fully away from Knox, “Let’s get you to bed. I’m sorry. We’ll talk in a few minutes, Knox. Don’t kill each other while I’m gone.”

“No promises,” Charlie smirked, and if it had been a day earlier, that would have made Knox’s blood boil. But for some reason, he felt civil. He felt like he could trust Charlie. Maybe he was dreaming, but if he was dreaming, he was in a nightmare.

As Todd motioned Neil away, Knox felt Charlie’s eyes pull to him. He was quite disheveled. He had on a pair of scrubs, a green hoodie, and pink tennis shoes. He wasn’t due at work for another couple hours. He’d taken a shift from one of his girlfriends, who was seeing her daughter’s second grade school play with her husband. He must have looked crazy, and he sniffed again, willing the tears that had built up away.

“You ever dated somebody that you loved so much it felt like nothing else mattered?” Charlie pulls him from his current induced stupor, and Knox can barely see him through his tears.

“Don’t be smart with me right now. I’m sorry. I’ll be back to the bickering soon. I just… I need a minute.”

“I didn’t mean it to be anything. I’m genuinely asking.”

“Well, yes. Yeah. Chris.”

“I haven’t.” Charlie says, and it feels so vulnerable that Knox wants to start bearing their souls more. He doesn’t understand why, but he

needs to know why Charlie hasn't been loved. Besides the annoying part, he needs to know why he hasn't loved anybody so much that his heart breaks. "But if you love her, like you say that you do, you should tell her; and really tell her. But if you don't, if you're just…" He stopped, biting his lips. "Sorry. Don't want to overstep my boundaries."

"Say it." Knox feels breathless, a recurring theme around Charlie.

"If you really love her like you say you do, that's great. It'll last a lifetime. But if you only love her and aren't sure that you really know her, who do you love?"

"That's crazy. I love her. I love Chris."

"What do her and her friends do for fun?"

"Well, she mostly hangs out with Ginny. She has lots of work friends, but Ginny is her closest. They've been best friends since middle school."

"What do they do for fun?"

"They're both working right now. Ginny's a director. She just got her first feature film, and Chris is starring in it. So is Ginny."

"What's it about?"

"It's a love story."

“You read the script?”

“She wanted me to. It was beautiful. Ginny did a great job. They’re going to be brilliant together. They’ve always been close.”

“They’re playing the lovers?”

“It’s a renaissance piece. Sort of Joan of Arc-ish. But they don’t burn at the stake in the end. It’s happy. They get to be happy together.”

“Oh,” Charlie nods, making a humming sound. “Did they hold auditions?”

“For everybody else. She wanted Chris.”

“She wanted Chris,” Charlie hums again, “She wanted Chris.”

It’s then, in Todd Anderson’s small kitchen, that Knox feels his feet fall from underneath him. Charlie grabs him at the last minute, and Knox feels like he’s been electrocuted from the hands holding him in place. Charlie’s hands. His head is spinning, he’s hyperventilating, and it’s only after Charlie says his name that Knox lets the words pass through his lips.

“Chris didn’t just go to do the movie. Did she?”

“What do you think?” Charlie is still holding him, tender and strong.

“She’s *your* girlfriend.”

“I don’t know,” Knox grumbles, letting himself fall into Charlie as Charlie wraps his arms around him. He can’t stand him, still, it’s all a bit too much. But he’s comforting, and he smells like old cigarettes and pine and something else Knox can’t place. It’s so overwhelming that he can’t help but slump against him, letting out another anguished cry. “I don’t know.”

Chapter End Notes

this slow burn is killing me we gotta speed things up. happy lesbian visibility day <3

my hands can't feel to grip

Chapter Summary

> Charlie's going to a bar. Charlie's taking Knox home. Knox has something secret. Why is he crying?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

There was a lot of emotions building up in Charlie's heart, and in his mind. There was too much going on. He felt sick, like he was stuck in an endless loop of time that seemed to only repeat over and over again, harboring the same results. Because of this, he was unsure of what he wanted to get accomplished anymore.

He seemed to be in a mindless floating state at work, checking boxes and calling people and making everything run. He was unsure of all the press he'd been getting as of late, the young business man who was going to take over a multi-billion dollar company. It was all a lot of pressure, and there wasn't much that he could do to soften that blow. Everybody was watching, at all times, and he floated about work in a trance-like state.

The only thing that seemed to help Charlie was the fact that something had broken in him at Todd's apartment. Something had fallen out from under him when he had grasped Knox that night, had helped him up off the ledge he was talking himself onto. He was frantic, unsure of how to develop a discussion on his feelings. He had felt that lightening through his entire body as Knox slumped against him, and had felt it much later into the night and the next morning, when he'd woken up cold and anxious in his own apartment.

He was falling into something deep, something murky and vast. Without really giving it much thought, he decided very quickly that he needed to fall in love with something else, and quickly. It didn't have to be love, but it needed to be quick and strong. He was feeling increasingly frantic, and when Neil texted with plans for the weekend,

it took no time at all for him to say yes.

Of course, the get together was at a bar Charlie hadn't heard of. He didn't really take his time with partying in the city much anymore, and if he was going out, it was normally by himself (and to get laid). But he didn't have many friends, so he decided that even if Knox was going to be there, he was going to have a good time. No matter what.

By the time he showed up at the address Neil had texted him, everybody had already gotten a drink, and some of the couples from the friend group were already dancing. At the place they'd claimed, he found Knox, who was nursing a drink, and Meeks and Cameron, who were chatting calmly to him, likely talking him out of something drastic; or at least, that's how it appeared.

"Hey, guys." Charlie greeted, and the little trio looked up at him, clearly a little surprised that he'd come.

"Charlie," Meeks smiled, then patted Knox's back, whispering something into his ear. Cameron did a similar gesture, and the two greeted Charlie before walking off.

Alone with him again, Charlie debated leaving to go and get a drink, anything to just stop the hammering that was going on in his heart. He felt like he was swimming, trying to keep the tide that was Knox at bay.

"Did they tell you about it too? Is that why you're here?" Knox asked, hiccuping. It was only across from him in the booth that Charlie could see that he'd been crying. Knox wiped at his face, and looked expectantly at him.

"No," Charlie shook his head. "I heard you were all getting together. I

came.”

“Oh,” And the sigh that escaped his lips was enough to quiet even the loudness of the bar’s atmosphere.

“Are you okay?”

“I don’t really want to talk about it. Sorry.”

“I’m gonna grab a drink. You want something?”

“Sure,” He nodded, knocking back the rest of his own.

Not bothering to ask what he’d like, Charlie stepped through the crowds as he went up to the bartender, sliding in between a couple who were talking animatedly and an older woman who was eyeing one of the bartenders. He looked a bit too expensive for the place, but he figured that maybe that was to be his ultimate curse with his job. He was also incredibly warm. He wasn’t sure if it was from the heat of the bodies in the bar or if it was from Knox. He didn’t know what was wrong with him, and it made his insides twist up. He didn’t know what he was referencing, and he only hoped he could know. This new friendship thing they were trying out was sure to be rocky, but he was hopeful. He was so drawn to him that he didn’t know if his heart could take it.

After securing the drinks, a beer for himself and a vodka soda for Knox, he was stopped by Neil, whose face was red from heat. The dance floor, which he’d just gotten off of, looked like it was going to welcome him right back. “Don’t push too hard tonight,” He said, looking at the booth then at the the drinks in Charlie’s hands. “He’s had a rough week.”

“What happened?”

“If he tells you, let him. If he doesn’t, don’t mention it. Keep him entertained.”

“Uh… okay,” Neil smiled, planting a wet kiss on Charlie’s cheek before he snuck back to the floor.

As Charlie came back to the table, Knox had his head in his hands, looking about as sad and forlorn as anyone could possibly look. “Are you okay?” Charlie asked, sliding across from him and offering him a drink.

“Peachy,” Knox sniffed, trying to brighten up his eyes as he wiped them again.

“Sorry. Shouldn’t press,” Charlie offered, and Knox smiled a little sadly at him. He took a sip of his drink, watching him carefully.

“Thanks for the drink.”

“It’s no problem.”

They sat in silence again, and Charlie felt very distanced from himself. He wasn’t sure why, but he felt like he needed to ask Knox every question in the entire world. What was his favorite color? Did he like Chinese food? Anything to get Charlie’s mind off of what was affecting Knox so desperately. So, burning with desire to ask him something and get him away from the forlorn-ness of the situation, he

immediately got to that task. What better way to introduce themselves than to get to know one another?

“What’s your favorite color?”

“You don’t have to do this. Really.”

“Do what?”

“Ask about me since I’m not looking well. It’s okay, really.”

Charlie didn’t know what to say, feeling that the words were a slap in the face. While they were true, it didn’t stop him from what he was spewing next. “Nobody asked me to do this. It doesn’t matter to me what happened. I want to know more about you, despite our differences and all that stuff between us.”

“You’re not pulling my leg?” Knox was downing the vodka soda, and his cheeks were tinged pink.

“I want to know more about you.”

“What do you want to know?”

“What’s your favorite color?”

“You trying to play twenty questions with me again?”

“You remember that?”

Knox gave a look that made Charlie’s entire body shiver, and he gripped his drink a little tighter, watching as Knox took another gulp of his own, which was already almost drained.

“Course. Your favorite color is red and you’re an only child.”

“I’m surprised you remember that. Your favorite color must be pink, right?”

“Yes, it is.”

“You’ve got two siblings. Sisters. Gwen and Nora, but Nora’s the youngest. You’re the oldest.”

“Yeah,” Knox nodded, shaking his head a moment, blowing a stream of air through his lips.

“I remember too.”

“I remember everything about you, every time we’ve met.” The words leaving Knox’s lips knocked the air out of Charlie, and before he could process and spit out another word back, Cameron and Neil were coming over to the table.

“I bought shots!” Neil grins, filling in next to Charlie and slipping an

arm around his neck. “Will you get the next round?”

“Yeah,” Charlie nods, breathless. “Sure.”

The two were still watching, carefully, the murky water around them lapping at their sides dangerously and filling up the space between them. The noise from everyone else joining soon overtook whatever moment they were letting themselves have, and the night continued on.

After three rounds of shots had been ordered, and Charlie had only taken one, he was itching for a cigarette. He was getting better about it, really. Or at least, he was trying to. But whenever alcohol was flowing through his system, he couldn’t help but itch for one. Or for something to take his mind off of what he was thinking about (Knox’s lips).

“Charlie!” Todd called, his face flushed. “Don’t go!”

“I was just going to have a cig.”

“Don’t. You’ll smell.”

“Yeah,” Charlie nodded, “Is Knox okay?”

“No.” Todd shook his head, then wrapped his arms around Charlie, a laugh escaping him. “We’re getting an uber to Neil’s. I think Meeks and Pitts already left, and Cameron and Stick were taking a cab. Can you take Knox home? I would, but I sort of… well, I just…”

“Yeah, I can.” Charlie nodded, the need for a cigarette already subsiding as he watched Knox’s form in the booth. “I can do that.”

“Great. Did you drive here?”

“No. I’ll just call a cab.”

“Great. Thanks so much. I really like you, Charlie. I’m so glad Neil had you.”

Charlie smiled, patting Todd on the back as he eventually pulled away, slipping his hand into Neil’s and waving their goodbyes. By the time Charlie found his way back to the booth, everyone had gone their separate ways.

“You’re taking me home, I guess.” Knox laughed, sweet and muddled.

“Yeah, I am. Can you stand? How much have you had?”

“I don’t remember. Sorry,” He shook his head, and it looked as though he was going to cry again.

“It’s no problem, really. Just tell me your address. I’ll get you home safe.”

Knox mumbled the address, and Charlie helped him out of the booth. When their skin finally collided, in the brush on Charlie’s fingers around Knox’s neck on the way to his shoulder, it had a sobering effect on the loud mouthed one of the pair. Charlie felt like his entire

body was being lit on fire, nothing but gasoline to fuel it. He didn't know if Knox had felt it, but the way that the taller man was leaning into him was enough to stop any alcohol running through his veins.

Outside, it didn't take long for them to fall into a cab. Knox was humming something under his breath as Charlie talked to the cabbie, who assured them it would be quick. From the speed they were going, Charlie knew that would be true.

"I'm gonna call her," Knox slurred next to him, reaching for his phone.

"Hey, hey! Hey!" Charlie, who Knox seemed to really notice for the first time since they'd gotten in the cab, gripped Knox's hand softly, sliding the phone from him and into his own pocket. "Don't, okay? You probably don't want to call anyone right now."

"Okay," Knox nodded, looking at Charlie's fingers, then moving his gaze to Charlie's face.

"Are you going to need help getting up the steps?"

"Yeah," Knox nodded, and letting whatever melancholy he was feeling wash back over him. He laid back in the seat, his fingers holding onto Charlie's a moment longer before dropping them.

The rest of the ride was mostly silent, aside from Charlie paying and helping Knox out of the cab. It was good to be so close to him, no matter what the circumstances that got them here was.

"I don't live in a penthouse like you do, so sorry if it's ugly."

Charlie grinned despite himself, “I’m sure I won’t have anything to say. Really.”

“I disagree. You always do.”

The trek up the flights was a bit cautionary, and by the time they’d gotten Knox’s key in the door, they were both sweating from the strain of it all.

“I need a drink,” Knox groaned, peeling himself away from Charlie. “I can’t believe you’re in my fucking apartment.”

“I’ll just be here until you get to bed. I promised I’d get you home safe.”

“I need a drink.” Then Knox started crying, large, immense tears.

“No, you don’t. Are you okay?”

“I’m not, no. I’m fucking emotional! Just like I always am!”

“I… look, do you need anything?”

“I need somebody to love me. So fucking badly, Charlie. That’s not a question like those games you like to play, but it’s so true. I need somebody to fucking love me.”

It was silent again as the weight of the words settled.

“Is there something I can do for you, Knox? Do you have ibuprofen? You’re gonna need some water.”

“I’m never gonna be enough, you know?” Knox was walking dangerously close, so close that if he got any closer, Charlie didn’t know if he’d be able to control himself. He was falling madly, and so, so deeply.

“Knox, I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Yeah, you do.” Knox nodded, that same sad smile pulling against his lips.

"Somebody's going to." He said, and Knox's eyes travelled to Charlie's lips, Charlie watching him as if it was in slow motion. "Somebody's going to fucking love you, Knox."

“Can you walk me to my room?” Knox asked, his gaze not traveling.

“Isn’t it right here? There’s only two doors.”

“Yeah,” Knox nodded, “Sorry. I haven’t had a guy over in a long time. If ever, in this apartment. It’s… I guess it isn’t really romantic.”

Charlie slung an arm around Knox’s waist, and the two hobbled the few steps into Knox’s bedroom. Charlie turned on the light by the door, and then he watched as Knox flopped onto his bed. The tension

in the room had died increasingly, but it still felt like there was something left unsaid for both parties.

“Change your clothes. I’ll grab you some water.”

Leaving before he could really understand anything, he was quick to fill a glass, then placed Knox’s phone on the counter. Better out here than in with the storm. If the whole night was about Chris, what had happened? Knox was nothing if a lover, and he loved her desperately. So if he needed somebody to love him, that made Charlie angry; even though he had absolutely no right to be.

When he had taken ample time outside to text Todd, Meeks, and a few other of Knox’s closer friends, he returned with a simple knock.

Knox was inside, laying in pink bedsheets, an old T-shirt over his head. “Thanks,” He croaked, and Charlie could tell that he was going to cry again.

As he drank the water, Charlie took in the room around him very quickly. It was very small, as was the usual in all New York apartments. The bedsheets were pink, the comforter was a tan color, and he had a poster on his wall of The Beatles’ *Yellow Submarine*, and a poster of a young, bearded Paul McCartney above it. He also had a framed Christmas photo of what Charlie assumed was his family over on the windowsill. He had a yellow shag rug underneath his shoes.

“I like your room.”

“Thanks,” Knox nodded, “I’ve been advised to move the merch somewhere else.”

“I like it.” He grinned, and Charlie worried if he was giving too much of himself away.

“You like the Beatles?”

“Everybody likes the Beatles, Knox.” Charlie actually found himself laughing, “Don’t cry about that. Seriously. I like it. I like your rug too.”

“Why are you being so nice to me?” Knox hiccuped, placing the empty glass precariously on the windowsill.

“We’re trying to start again. Remember?”

“Yeah. We are.”

“Do you need anything else? I’m probably going to head out.”

“Can you stay? Not here… but on my couch? I didn’t want to be alone tonight, and I should have said that earlier to them all, but I just… I don’t know. I feel like a burden. I’m sorry.”

“Uh… yeah. Yeah, I can.”

“I should offer you some clothes or something.”

“No, it’s okay. Just sit, sit down.”

“You’re gonna stay?”

“Yeah. You need me.”

“Yeah. Even if I hate you, I do. I need somebody who isn't going to break my heart tonight.”

“No problem,” Charlie swallowed, a thick feeling in his throat. "And I wouldn't think of it."

“Thanks, Charlie. For more than I can say.”

“Get some rest.” Charlie nodded, and took himself out of the room. He stumbled his way to his own glass of water, then settled in to Knox’s green couch. There was a television on the wall across, and a poster of The Beatles’ movie HELP! was on the wall. As soon as he sat down, Charlie felt the exhaustion from all the worrying he had been doing (and was still doing) ebb back into his bones. Pretty soon, as he looked at some house plants, he began to nod off, into what was sure to be a restless sleep.

Chapter End Notes

knox is literally a Paul McCartney girlie that's literally his truth

thinking how good it can be

Chapter Summary

Knox wakes up to Charlie.

In the haze of the first morning, when the gums of his teeth felt fuzzy and the cracks in his curtains were hitting his face just enough for it to be a bit late in the morning, Knox woke up with one of the worst headaches he'd had in recent years. Of course, he'd gotten painfully drunk in that trip he'd been on the night before, and he was determined to try and forget about the painful last few days he'd had.

He rolled over to his bedside table, not finding his phone anywhere in sight. Groaning, he sat up, somehow glad that for a few moments, he'd be forgiven from checking his messages religiously and trying to do any damage control of anything he'd sent the previous night.

Grunting with a stretch of his arms, he stood up, glad to see that he'd somehow managed to change before passing out. He remembered bits and pieces of last night, namely Charlie. It was always Charlie, wasn't it? He wasn't any better than Chris, with the way his mind was drenched in Charlie, Charlie, Charlie. It had been for the last few years. "Fuck," Knox shook his head, flopping back into the sheets. He looked up to his poster on the wall, and bearded Paul McCartney stared back at him. "What am I going to do?" Knox asked aloud, as if he was asking God for help. It was something he did every once in awhile, when his life really felt as though it was falling apart from every section and there was no glue to hold it together. With no advice from the poster, Knox groaned again, finally planting his feet on the floor.

A sound was coming from his kitchen, and not knowing what he could defend himself against on a night after being out, he cautiously exited his room, poking his head out just an inch. The sight before him was enough to elicit a gasp, as Charlie Dalton was in his kitchen, cooking. He'd been wearing a white button up and a blazer the night before, and he was still wearing the shirt from last night, the sleeves rolled up

to his elbows.

“Morning, sunshine,” Charlie smiled, having heard Knox’s gasp.

“Uh, hi.”

“Did you forget I spent the night?”

“Yeah,” Knox nodded, leaving his room, his throat scratching. “Sorry.”

“No problem. Your couch was pretty comfy. I’m cooking us breakfast, I hope that’s okay.”

“You didn’t have to,” Knox shakes his head, and Charlie is handing him a glass of water and an ibuprofen.

“I wanted to.” He says, and there’s a tense silence as he watches Knox drink the water, take the medicine.

“I hope I didn’t do anything stupid.”

“Nothing I wouldn’t have done, if I was in your situation.”

“I don’t know if that’s good or bad.”

“I don’t either. I don’t really know what happened to you.”

“I wish,” Knox huffs, and pulls his phone off of the counter where its been laid. He scrolls through his messages, missed calls. There’s a text from a co-worker he has, five messages from his friends, and there’s ten texts and a phone call from Chris, plus a missed call from Ginny.

“Your phone kept ringing this morning. I just let it.” Charlie nods, turning back to what he’s cooking: pancakes. Bacon is sizzling in the oven, and Knox wonders if he’s this good to everyone when he sleeps over.

“I probably need to answer some of these. Sorry,” Knox looks down at his phone, overwhelmed by the massiveness of it all.

The texts from all of his friends are virtually the same. Todd’s is the last that came through.

Todd:

Charlie texted all of us. Glad you are okay. Text me when you get up tomorrow. He’ll take good care of you. I love you. So much.

Then, he looked at the texts from Chris.

Chris:

Knox, I need you to call me back.

Knox, please answer your phone.

I know I did something really shitty, but I haven’t even gotten a chance to explain myself. Call me back, please.

Knox, please call me back.

Are you okay?

Where are you?

Knox, call me back.

There's so much I want to say to you.

Knox, I love you. You know that. I always will love you. I just need you to call me back.

Okay, I get that you don't want to talk to me right now. But you're going to have to. And when you do, I'll be here. I love you.

"Chris?"

"Uh, yeah," Knox nodded, feeling a knot grow deep in his throat, settling deep into his body.

"If you want to talk about it, I'm all ears."

"I'm just… I don't know."

"Here," Charlie presented a plate in front of him, and Knox was so grateful for the sparkling of friendship that he wanted to reach out and bury himself into Charlie's arms, inhale whatever scent he had and wrap himself up in it.

Charlie dug into his plate, and Knox joined him. He was listening to music quietly, which Knox hadn't realized with all the sounds from the cooking process. The sounds of Bruce Springsteen were mingling with their forks clanging on the plates.

“Ooo, almost forgot,” Charlie said, turning around as he poured coffee into Knox’s favorite pink mug. “Coffee!”

That felt like the nail in the coffin, the stake through the heart. “Thanks,” Knox felt himself muttering, the crush spilling over his guts and swirling in his coffee with the sugar cube he’d put inside of it.

Charlie didn’t say anything then, silently eating, watching him carefully. Knox ate a few bites, assessing what to do about it all.

“I’m sorry about last night. I was so emotional. Chris just… it’s been a lot. And I’m sorry if I said anything embarrassing or something like that.”

“Nothing to apologize for. I’ve been much worse myself.”

“I’ve just had a really shitty last few days. Chris has been filming that movie she’s doing out in LA, and I really am so happy for her. You know that, right?”

“Of course.”

“And she… I don’t know. She called me and told me that she doesn’t know if we’re going to work out anymore. That she cheated on me. She cheated on me with Ginny. Just like you said that one night. She wanted Chris, and Chris wanted her. And I just… I wouldn’t have been so batshit crazy about it if she had just told me. She knows how much I love her, how much I respect her, and if she’d just told me that she had feelings for Ginny I wouldn’t have felt so fucking stupid. But I do, and now that’s that. I just feel like I loved her so much, and she didn’t even care enough to tell me about someone she loved. It just makes

me feel really shitty." Knox wiped at his eyes, the tears that had built up threatening to spill.

"Do you have work today?"

"That's all you have to offer?"

"Well, do you?"

"No."

"I don't either." Charlie nodded, "I can either shower here and you can give me some clothes, or we'll have to go by my place."

"For what?"

"I'm going to take you out."

"What?"

"I'm going to take you out."

"Charlie?"

"Don't say no, okay? I want to start again. We need to."

“You don’t…”

“We’re always saying that, right? We don’t want to, that we don’t really like each other. And maybe we do, maybe we don’t. But I haven’t been able to stop thinking about you since that drive from Chicago, so let’s just forget that we’ve had problems for a little while, alright? Let’s go to your favorite place in the city. For a whole day. I’ll buy us crazy expensive dinner and crazy expensive wine and we’ll take a break from everything shitty happening to you. We’ll listen to the Beatles in my car and I’ll buy you something pink.”

Knox was speechless. That feeling was sizzling in his bones now.

“Sound good?”

“It sounds… it sounds like Charlie Dalton.”

“That good or bad?” Charlie laughed, taking a sip of coffee.

“Good. Brilliant, I think.”

“You better get a shower, then. We’ve got a long day ahead of us.”

“Okay, yeah.”

“After we finish this meal, of course.”

“Of course, yeah. Thank you. It’s delicious.”

“It is.” Charlie grinned, and Knox was sure that whatever was about to happen to him was only going to cement one fact harder and harder. He had been infatuated with Charlie Dalton since their drive to Chicago.

look at all the lonely people

Chapter Summary

Charlie falls in with Knox.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Charlie was feeling like his skin was going to crawl of his body. First, there was the night before. Then, there had been the most restless sleep of his life, where he'd busied himself by his inability to sleep on the uncomfortable couch by looking at Knox's DVD collection. Once he'd awoken, he couldn't fall back to sleep. Once it was an appropriate time, he'd fixed breakfast.

Then, Knox had gotten ready. Charlie had sat in the living room, back on that pink couch while Knox was showering, watching as the day came together and the little details of Knox's apartment began to stand out to him. He liked to decorate, had various posters or postcards of places and people hanging up. It was all quite elaborate. He even had colorful plates and silverware.

He'd come quickly out of the bathroom, toweling his hair in a hurried manner. They'd gotten a cab, and now Charlie was showering in his apartment as Knox poked around. He was quite sure that he'd probably never seen somewhere as inevitably drab as Charlie's place was. He had no posters, hardly anything that wasn't black, white, or grey. He'd never gotten around to putting his own touch to things with work, and he had never thought much about it until he'd seen Knox's place.

Looking at himself in the mirror to remind himself that no matter what was going to happen, he had to be reasonable, he exited the bathroom. Knox was on his balcony, and he looked like he was in amazement. Charlie would have been, too. He had a gorgeous, brilliant apartment. But, it had never felt much like home.

“This place is amazing,” Knox smiled, turning as he heard Charlie’s footsteps.

“Yeah,” Charlie nodded, trying to remind himself that Knox was nothing more than a friend. A friend. No longer an enemy or foe. He was a friend.

“I think I’m going to call Chris, if that’s alright with you.”

“You should wait a little,” Charlie found himself spewing, the words coming out of his ugly mouth. “Just until the day’s over. You need a day away from all of it.”

“You think so?”

“I don’t know, but you’re coming out with me. Aren’t you?”

“Yeah, I am.” Knox smiled, shifting uncomfortably a moment before looking back at him. “I am. What are we doing?”

“That’s for me to decide,” Charlie smirked, twirling his car keys in his hand. “Ready?”

“Yeah,” Knox nodded.

The two got in the elevator, and it wasn’t long before they were zipping through the streets of New York City. Knox had never known

anyone in the city who owned a car, and the fact that Charlie owned such an expensive one was no surprise to him. The Beatles' *With the Beatles* was blasting through the stereo off of Charlie's phone, and with the wind hitting his face from the window, Charlie was pretty certain this was going to be a good day, no matter what.

The afternoon was spent around his favorite spots. They went to the Metropolitan Museum, and Charlie wasn't sure what art was his favorite. Maybe it was the way Knox had lit up at the Rene Magritte's *The Lovers*. He'd apparently seen it a hundred times before, but he said he'd never get sick of it. Charlie felt like he was in a daze all day as the Museum gave way to Central Park which gave way to dinner at one of Charlie's favorite, most expensive restaurants. By the time dinner was over, Charlie took Knox to another spot that he loved, although it was pretty far out of the city. They watched the sun set from a bridge Charlie had found a long time ago, and Knox turned to him while they drove back with a look that sent Charlie's heart ablaze.

"You've more than delivered on the Beatles. But I thought I was promised something pink."

"Yeah," Charlie smiled, "There's an ice cream place where I live, and they make the best strawberry in the world."

Knox grinned back, and the Beatles played through the car once again.

As they ate their ice cream, Charlie found himself walking back to his apartment, wondering if Knox was going to ask him to drive him home, if they were going to spend another night together. He was definitely going to go home, but as Charlie watched him, those thoughts kept straying to other things.

“This has been so amazing. I think I’m going to call Chris, just before the night ends. So it can end on a good note when you take me home.”

“Okay,” Charlie nodded, the elevator bringing them into his cold world and leaving behind the sweet, sticky pink of the outside.

Knox bid himself goodbye as he walked out onto the balcony, and Charlie went into his room, lying down with a large sigh before sitting up and beginning to stare at the wall. He checked his messages, finding a few from Neil, but none were of much importance. Something about a book he’d read, the usual lot from Neil. He clearly didn’t know that he and Knox had been together all day. Maybe that was for the best. He’d probably ask about everything under the sun, and he needed a few moments to debrief himself.

There was no possible world in which Charlie hadn’t convinced himself of one fact. He was attracted to Knox, unbelievably so. And not only that, he felt like he had been for a long, long time. Since Hawaii. Since the car ride. Either way, there it was. Out in the open, there was no taking back the words he’d had mulling around in his head for the last few weeks. He sat there a while longer, letting it all sink into his bones, whirl around in his head.

A padding of feet startled Charlie out of his stupor, and then there was Knox, throwing himself onto the bed next to Charlie and wrapping his arms around him as though he just couldn’t stand it.

“Knox?” Charlie felt his heart drop as Knox began to cry, clinging to him desperately.

“She cheated on me. With Ginny. She cheated on me, and it wouldn’t hurt so badly if she’d just told me that she liked her. That she liked girls at all. Charlie, she never told me. She never told me, and I loved

her so much. I loved her so much and she never told me because she was scared of what everyone was going to think of her. She loves Ginny, you see? She loves her so much, and holy shit, did she think I was going to think less of her because she has a crush on a girl? I've had a crush on you for years and I never said anything because I loved her, but I hated you."

"Knox," Charlie couldn't, and wouldn't get into this tonight. Not with so much in the air. There was too much happening, and none of which were going to be good for an outcome. "Knox, stop."

"Kiss me," Knox said, the change in air so stifling that it crackled with electricity.

"I'm so sorry." Charlie was at a loss of the spillage of the words, the carnage of the affair in his arms. "But I can't."

"I've seen the way you look at me, Charlie." He countered, and the world turned on its head. Their arms were still around each other.

"Knox…"

"I don't want to be alone anymore. I'm so sick of it."

"I can't."

"You've never really hated me, have you?"

"What?"

“When we were at the hotel that night. Before I showered, there was that moment. DIdn’t you feel it? Like the Earth was splitting open in two.”

“Knox,” Charlie felt like the wind had been kicked out of him.

“You felt it. I know you did. *I know you did*! You do right now, don’t you? Don’t tell me I’m crazy, okay? I can’t… I can’t handle that.”

“I don’t think you’re crazy. I didn’t say that.”

“Then kiss me.”

“Knox, I don’t think that’s a good idea.”

“You want to, don’t you? Don’t you want to kiss me?”

“Yes,” Charlie didn’t know why he’d said it, and he knew it probably was the worst mistake of his life, to be kissing what he figured was probably the boy of his dreams on the most emotional, worst day of his life. But because Charlie was just human, he couldn’t stop himself.

And then, they were kissing. Charlie had never felt fireworks so deeply or so brightly in his chest, and he had to pull away quickly after they’d begun, already panting.

“Why’d you stop?” Knox all but whined, his fingers carding through

Charlie’s hair.

“Just in disbelief, I guess.” He sounded stupid. He was at a loss for words.

“Kiss me again.”

“Are you sure?”

“I’ve never been more sure of anything.”

Chapter End Notes

thinking about a new Charlie and Knox series after I finish this..... literally they live in my head rent free

an angel with wings of fire

Chapter Summary

Knox wakes up in Charlie's arms.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The next morning, Knox woke up in Charlie Dalton's arms. He was surprised to see Charlie still sleeping, and too scared to try and slip out from his arms, he just laid there, unsure of what was going to happen when Charlie woke up.

He'd poured his stupid little heart out, gotten ahead of himself, and started telling Charlie he liked him. And now, he was lying in bed with him. Naked! He wished that he'd been drunk last night, so he wouldn't remember everything from the night before, but he remembered everything. Everything was clear as glass.

He remembered how Charlie's lips felt like they were scorching his entire soul, leaving nothing behind. He remembered how Charlie was so tender, so careful, so eager to please him, to let him run the show. He remembered how Charlie's hands were burning into his skin, how they felt like they were trailing a ring of fire everywhere they touched. He remembered how Charlie was willing to be whatever he needed him to be. He was happy to just kiss until Knox had slipped his hands under Charlie's shirt. He remembered how Charlie sounded when he moaned, something that lit Knox's whole body on fire, only adding to the blaze that had been burning. The water that was lapping always at Knox when he was around Charlie had evaporated with the heat. The night had been sticky, sweaty, moments of bumping into each other and hurried desires and Knox's name flowing out of his mouth like lava.

The sun was up and he could hear birds chirping. Knox didn't know what time it was, or frankly when it was, and had he just called Chris yesterday? She'd given him a piece of her heart, a piece she was too

afraid to share. It hurt more than he could bear almost. And then, there he was, spilling his guts to Charlie that he'd found him attractive and he liked him.

Charlie kept trying to stop it for the first few moments, and Knox knew he was being emotional, but when they'd started, it felt like they couldn't stop. The way Charlie gripped his hair while Knox was giving him head was enough to make Knox wish he'd done it to him that first night in the hotel room all those years ago.

Charlie's breathing pattern next to him began to change, and Knox knew that the inevitable was going to come up. Charlie was going to kick him out of the apartment and they weren't going to speak again. Or at least, they weren't going to speak until they had to at a proposed friend event. Knox felt his heart skip a beat. He hadn't thought much about the future last night, what while Charlie's hands in his hair and his mouth on him.

"Good morning," He grumbled, his voice deep as his grip on Knox's hip tightened.

"Hi," Knox felt queasy all of a sudden.

"How long have you been staring at me?"

"Just thinking about last night."

"You must have been up for awhile then."

Knox felt himself blush. Charlie had said things in bed that he'd never imagined could have really come from his mouth last night. He was

being so sweet that Knox was almost sure he was going to die. “ *You’re so fucking pretty, Overstreet. Beautiful.* ” He didn’t want to ask if he’d meant it. He was going to keep believing for a little while that he did.

“I have some food if you want me to make breakfast. I can also pay for us to go out somewhere, if you want.”

“You already took me to dinner yesterday. And we did a bunch of other stuff yesterday. That you paid for.”

“It’s no big deal. You know that.”

They were both silent, still feeling out whatever they couldn’t get to. Well, Knox could live if he hadn’t meant anything last night. Maybe. If he showered, lit his soul on fire, and jumped into a cold river, he could forget it all.

“I’m sorry about last night. I got emotional about Chris, and I said… unforgivable stuff. And then… I guess I let my emotions win.”

“Yeah,” Charlie said, untangling the two of them and sitting up, stretching with a yawn. “I guess I did too.”

It was silent then, and Knox got up too, stretching and trying to calm his hammering heart.

“I meant what I said, about being attracted to you and everything.”

Charlie didn’t say anything a moment, just laughed mercilessly as he

gathered up his clothes, pulling on a fresh pair of boxers from his drawer and a Cure shirt. He rifled a moment longer, smiling widely as he threw the same at Knox.

“Uh… Charlie?”

“I know you meant it, Knox.” He sidled up to his dresser, hanging on it as Knox pulled the clothes on, fumbling. “I meant what I said too.”

“Oh,” Knox smiled, trying to find his clothes from last night and get them all together.

“I don’t drool over everybody like that. No matter what kind of whore you think I am.” He laughed heartily, and Knox found himself fumbling again. He was unsure where this was going now.

“I guess… friends?” He put his balled up clothes on Charlie’s bed, looking over at him.

“What did you want from this?”

“I wanted to have sex with you.”

“Is that it?” The conversation seemed serious now, as though Charlie was unsure what Knox was saying.

“I don’t know. What do you want?”

“Well, I thought I hated you for a long time. I think that hate turned to love.”

“*Love*?!”

“Uh… I don’t know. We don’t have to talk about that just yet.”

“That sounds good. We should wait awhile. Sorry.”

“Did you want to kiss me?” Charlie asks, and Knox thinks *yes* immediately. “Did you want to kiss me in Hawaii when you were on vacation and we talked in that little area at the bar?”

“Yes.”

“Then you lied about how you didn’t want to.”

“Yes.”

“I wanted to kiss you that first night.”

“Why didn’t you try?”

“You were so pissed off. And when I woke up, you were spooning me.” Charlie answered, “That’s why I got up and made coffee. I didn’t want you to bite my head off.”

“Really?”

“Yeah.”

“So I guess that’s the answer to all this, then.”

“What?”

“Don’t you think that it’s fate?”

“What is?”

“That we keep running into each other. College, Hawaii, the airport. When I got in your car, I thought I was drowning. I think we’re drawn to each other somehow. Like cosmically. Like fate.”

“I thought I was just getting the worst luck ever.” They both smiled at that.

“Do you want breakfast?”

“I could eat, yeah.”

“Me too. I’ll make us something, if you want to shower.”

“Yeah, I’ll do that.”

“Cool.”

“Cool.”

Knox smiled, and Charlie left him to shower in his bathroom. He wasn’t sure what it all meant, but maybe it meant that something was on the horizon for them. Someday. Certainly not today. As he lugged himself into the bathroom, the sight of himself shocked him. He was wearing Charlie’s Beatles shirt. It was red.

Chapter End Notes

sorry to my loyal fan base of three tonight. new surprises coming your way

i want a spirit that is calm

Chapter Summary

Charlie hasn't called in 2 weeks.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It had been two weeks since Charlie had woken up next to Knox Overstreet, having shared a morning of sweet flirting and breakfast. They'd split up sometime around noon, after Charlie had kissed him goodbye, and then he'd proceeded to have a next level, insane, freak out moment. He was just starting to be friends with him, and then he'd gone and ruined it all by sleeping with him. Cursing himself, he'd texted Neil, unsure of what to do. Neil had simply sent a text that read Charlie's mind. *YOU DID WHAT?????!*

There wasn't anything he could do about that now, and he'd been sitting without a thought in the world for two whole weeks. It had been two agnoizing weeks of texts from Knox that read things like: *Dinner tonight? :)* which had eventually spiraled into *Did I do something wrong?* It was all too much, and much like most of Charlie's relationships when they went haywire, he chose not to put much thought into it. If he thought about it, it was going to hurt. And that hurt was going to be so much worse than it normally was.

So, he'd been ignoring him for two weeks. Two weeks where Charlie suddenly cared so much about his job that he was flying through clients, working on getting infrastructure put back together, mending all the messes at the bank that his father had left behind. He'd been making great relationships there, trying to weed out the people who weren't a good fit and get new people in charge that were. It wasn't fun work, and it was pretty taxing, and he'd been living horribly the last few weeks because of it. He had barely messaged Neil, had barely even talked to people at the bank. He was trying to exist without making a deal of anything, without anyone coming around and asking him questions. He couldn't handle it if Knox called him one more time and left a breathy voice mail asking about what he meant to him. He

couldn't.

So, when he opened the door to Neil Perry on a Saturday night, he was quite surprised. He'd had a phone call with an overseas executive earlier in the day, and he was still feeling frazzled from all the work he had to do all of the time.

"Uh, hello?" He greeted, opening the door to his place, cocking his head slightly as Neil came into the place.

"So you're not dead, that's good."

"If this is about Knox, or the last two weeks… I don't think I can talk about it, Neil. Really."

"You've got to talk about it."

"Well, I don't want to."

"You're breaking his heart. Can't you see that?"

"He's got to know that I can't… I shouldn't have slept with him after he found out everything about Chris. And I shouldn't have made him breakfast and I shouldn't have fallen in love with him. Is that what you want? You want me to tell you that I fell in love with him the moment I saw him? Well I did, okay? And it sounds fucking crazy because I couldn't stand him, but I fell in love with him either way. And now I've fucked it all up, okay? I know I did." Charlie was panting, unsure of where the outburst had really come from. He hated Knox, didn't he? Those stupid bangs, the way he looked in the color pink. The way he'd looked in his shirt he'd worn home.

“Charlie,” Neil looked like the wind had been kicked out of him. “What’s happening to you?”

“I don’t know, alright?”

“If you’re anxious about work, or how Knox feels about you, just say so. I can’t help you with work, but I know for a fact that Knox feels the same way you do, so you don’t have to run around like crazy.”

“I know he feels the same way.”

“Then what are you doing this for?” Neil shook his head, “You deserve to be happy.”

“I just don’t know what to do about it all, so I thought if I let it go, it’d go away.”

“You’re actually crazy. You’re coming out tonight with me.”

“I don’t want to go if he’s going to be there.”

“I don’t care! Charlie, I don’t ask for much. You need to give up whatever you’re trying to do and just *talk* to him. That’s all. Just talk to him. Don’t stay in your castle here forever.”

“You’re not going to force me, are you?”

“If I have to. I love you Charlie. You know that. Now stop getting in your head and just come with me.”

Charlie stared at his oldest friend in the world, trying to debate what he was getting from him. Either way, it didn’t matter. Neil was extremely pragmatic, and he was going to lose the war that was raging between them currently. Neil was his greatest friend, oldest confidante, and best pal. So, no matter what he was feeling (like jumping off a cliff or falling into the ocean from a high point), he was going to come with Neil, because following Neil was what Charlie had always done. Neil had been the guiding point, the star in the dark. He always was.

So, Charlie grabbed his keys and followed Neil out of his apartment. The drive there was silent, the windows were down, and the cool air was pooling all around them. Neil seemed genuinely angry with him, and Charlie couldn’t really blame him. He’d done nothing short of shitty actions the last few weeks.

They arrived at the bar just as the clock hit eight, and Charlie wondered why he’d let the day drag on for so long as the sky darkened and the night had begun. Each day was so cyclic for him that he was barely sure what was up or what was down. Was that what love was like?

Neil led him to a table in the back, where Todd was sitting. The usual crew was around, as well as two girls. He’d seen one before, only once, at the airport. *Well Charlie Dalton, I hope you continue to read. I’ve got exciting things planned.* The saccharine voice and girl were standing before him, pressed closely to a girl with brown hair.

Chris Noel was standing before him, her hand tucked in the girl’s pocket. Ginny. Knox wasn’t at the table, and before Charlie got too close or said anything that would likely embarrass himself, he looked around frantically. Where was Knox? Why was Chris back so soon from her movie? Why were they here?

His answer came swifter than expected. Knox was out on the dance floor, kissing a girl with mousey-brown hair as they danced to the music. Charlie felt something kick to life in his chest, as if he had been the monster in *Frankenstein*, lying dormant. He was moving on his own accord, unsure what was happening until he was standing beside the two, letting words pour out of his mouth.

“Knox?”

“Go away, Dalton.”

“Knox, we’ve got to talk!” He was shouting to be heard over the blare of the music.

“What the fuck do you want to talk about? You’ve been radio silent the last two weeks.”

“Can we just talk? For a second?”

The girl who was dancing looked at the two awkwardly, and slipped away a moment later, not wanting to get involved in the blowing hurricane that was happening between the two.

“What the fuck do you want to talk about?” Knox was dragging him to a corner, one that wasn’t too populated and it was still loud enough that no one was going to hear if they got too vicious with each other. It was near the bathrooms, and people were coming and going, but nobody was paying much attention.

“I’m sorry about the last two weeks. I just… I didn’t know what to do.”

“That makes two of us. Why didn’t you call me? Why didn’t you text me?”

“You said we should wait awhile to talk about us. I got scared.”

“Just be honest.”

“I am being honest. I got cold feet, alright? I got scared.”

“No, you didn’t. I just didn’t mean anything to you, right? I was just another fuck you had to cook breakfast for.”

Charlie straightened visibly from Knox’s words, and Knox felt like he was pulling closer to him, that magnet that they shared opposites ends with was getting closer to falling in on itself. “Don’t say that,” He said it like the words were made of poison.

“That’s what it was though, wasn’t it? We’ve never gotten along, isn’t that right? We’re like water and oil. We’re enemies, no matter what happens to us. You were spitting words like love at me. I guess you’re a better actor than I thought. Maybe you should join up with Neil.”

“Shut up,” The words came out more bitter than Charlie had meant them to, and they stung the air harshly.

“Make me,” Knox said, closing the gap between them with another

move towards Charlie.

It took Charlie a full five seconds before he had Knox pushed up against the farthest stall of the bathroom, his back making contact with people's phone numbers and scribbles of *CALL FOR A GOOD TIME!* "Don't talk with that pretty mouth for a second, yeah?"

"Oh fuck you, Dalton." Knox's voice was faltering, his reserves crumbling.

"I didn't call you for two weeks because the thought of being in love with you terrifies me, alright? I'm fucking terrified by how much I feel for you, and I'm terrified about it because I can't stand you. Is that what you wanted to hear?"

"No. I didn't mean anything to you. Just say that. Just say it." Knox was desperate for it.

"I can't say that and you fucking know it. Because I remember everything, alright?"

Charlie's head was spinning and he didn't know what was possessing him, but he put his hands on Knox's hips, his pinky slipping beneath his shirt to rest on Knox's skin. He looked up at him, and he could see those eyes. Knox loved him. He felt the exact same way. But he wasn't going to say it, and Charlie knew he wasn't going to get any further tonight than his own lamely confession, so he did the next best thing. He lent up to Knox's ear, tangled his other hand in his hair, and started in.

"I remember how it felt like I was being lit on fire when you kissed me, and I thought that if I didn't come up for air immediately that I was going to burn. I remember how you wanted to run the show and I

wanted to let you. I remember how your hands felt like they were torches on my skin and everywhere you touched was destroyed by fire. I remember how your hands slipped under my shirt and I thought I was going to die. I remember how you sounded when I was giving you head, and I remember that I wanted you to say my name over and over until it lost all meaning. So don't give me that bullshit about how it didn't mean anything to me." Charlie pulled himself off quickly, opening up the door to make his quick escape. "Because it did. It meant everything. No matter how much I can't stand your guts."

Turning on his heel, he went back out in the bar, his blood trembling through his veins. He had to see what Chris Noel and her girlfriend were doing here, with Knox right in front of them.

Chapter End Notes

thanks for the notes and the comments besties kisses xoxoxoxo

walk through the fires of all earthly desires

Chapter Summary

Knox and Chris talk.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Peeling himself off of the wall felt like he was trying to remove super glue from something he'd put together years ago. Knox felt like he was falling apart at the seams, a marionette doll that could never be put back together. He tried to pull himself together by washing his hands under the bar's cold water, the zing of it just enough to hurt but not enough to put his mushy body back together with the superglue he'd pulled it apart from.

And now, with the words from Charlie pooling around in his brain, he also had to deal with the fact that Chris had flown back to New York to make sure that he was okay. And she had flown back with Ginny. He wasn't mad at them, he couldn't be, with how utterly in love they were with each other. But the wound that Chris had opened was still quite fresh, so he wasn't exactly happy to see them just yet. He needed time before he could let Chris welcome him with open arms.

Looking at himself in the mirror and wondering why he was so exhausted all of the time, Knox took a deep, shaking breath and left the bar's bathroom. He meandered his way through the bodies until he saw what was happening at the table he'd left. Charlie was throwing back a shot, glaring at Chris as though she'd set a fire off underneath him.

Meeks looked like he was trying to get the party to disperse, cracking a joke that Cameron began to laugh very hardly at. Neil and Todd looked anxious, and Pitts was a little drunk, so he mostly had his head on Meeks's neck.

“Hey, let’s not say anything we’ll regret, okay?” Meeks said as Knox came over to the table, settling himself between the two parties.

“I didn’t say anything,” Chris huffed, “I came here because we need to talk, Knox. We’ve got to.”

“You should have come two weeks ago.” Charlie bit, and everybody began to bristle, the edge between the two evident and clear.

“You’re Charlie Dalton, right?”

“Yes.”

“The guy Knox keeps running into.”

“Yes.”

“I’ll admit, it was strange when Todd told me that you were Neil’s friend. You two can’t seem to escape each other.”

“Why’d we have to come here if you wanted to talk?”

“There’s an alley out back, isn’t there?” Chris asked, “Let’s go out there.”

Knox looked at her, and for once in his life, he couldn’t recognize who he was staring at. She looked so different than she had when she had left. She stood a little straighter, the bags under her eyes were

basically nonexistent, and she looked brighter, somehow. She looked like she was in love, for what was possibly the first time in her life.

"Okay," Knox nodded, "Yeah, let's go." He didn't look at anybody else at the table as he followed the girl, reminiscent of the days he would have followed her anywhere. He didn't want to catch anyone's reaction to the two of them leaving, and they were outside before he could capture how much time had passed.

"Knox," Chris huffed, and he could tell that her throat was tightening from the way she was speaking. He'd known her long enough to know that she was going to cry. "Knox."

"Sorry. I'd go first, but I just…"

"No, you shouldn't. I'm the one that cheated on you."

Knox didn't know what to say. He was nervous, like a little kid waiting for the doctor in her office.

"I cheated on you, and I didn't even have the decency to tell you about it. I told you over the phone that I cheated on you." She moved a piece of her hair, "I loved you, Knox. You've got to know that. I loved you so much, but when Ginny told me she had feelings for me before you proposed to me, I didn't know what to do. I loved you, and I've never been comfortable with how I label myself. I've always dated men. Always. You know that, but it just… it never felt right to me. And I know I could have talked about it with you, because you've always been so comfortable in your sexuality. You've always been someone who was so supportive, someone who knows who they are. But I haven't known who I was for years. Maybe my whole life.

"And when she told me, I was terrified. My best friend of years of my

life was in love with me, and I'd just gotten engaged to you. I went off to do her film, because I wanted to, because she asked me. I didn't have feelings for her at the time, but I care so deeply for her that I had to do anything for her. I'd have walked through fire if she'd asked me to. And when I got out there, to California, to the place she loves so much and lives and works, I saw a different side of her. Something I'd never seen before.

"She was so happy, Knox. So confident and wonderful and brilliant. I found myself falling in love with her. With the script she's written. With being with her. I didn't plan on acting on it; I really, really didn't. But I just… I couldn't help it. One dinner led to a night of dancing and laughing and when I woke up with her the next day, I knew that I wanted to be there forever. For the rest of my life, no matter how confused I'd been about my sexuality. I wanted to wake up to her for the rest of my life. No matter how scared it made me. I had to dive in head first. Because I'd never felt love like that in my entire life.

"And I loved you, I know that. I know that I did. Because when I was with you, it felt good. Like a safe haven to come home to. Like somebody who could take care of me and I could take care of you and we could spend the rest of the world together just happy like that. But it wasn't like it was with her. When I kissed her for the first time I felt like my entire body lit on fire. Like I was coming back to life after lying dormant for my whole life. I can't explain it, but I loved it so much, I couldn't stand it. And I know this isn't how I wanted to tell you, but you just have to believe me. I loved you the best I could, but I love her in a way I never thought I would.

"And I'm so sorry that it wasn't like that with you. I am. But I'll always love you. Always. Even if it isn't the way that you wanted me to. The way that you needed me to. But someday, somebody is going to kiss you and your body is going to light on fire, like it's woken up from a dream. If that was me, I'm so sorry. But I don't think I was, was I?"

"Uh, no." Knox clears his throat, not sure where the tears slipping

down his cheeks had come from. It still hurt, badly, but he couldn't do anything about it. She loved her. Desperately. "No."

"I wasn't yours, you weren't mine. You'll find that. You will." She put her arms around him, holding him close, and Knox wasn't sure that time went on as they stood there, their arms around each other, tears slipping down their cheeks. It was a good ending, although there was no happily ever after.

"I think I did." He said shakily, after they'd pulled apart and she'd pressed a kiss to his cheek.

"Hm?"

"I think I found that dream I woke up from."

She looked at him with a bit of confusion on her face, but it quickly slipped away. She knew. She always had.

"Charlie." She said, a smile growing on her lips. "Isn't it?"

"The day I learned about what happened with everything. I've been trying to be his friend, and he slept on my couch. Made me breakfast. Then I slept with him. I hadn't meant to. But when we started, we couldn't stop."

"Like a moth to a flame." Chris answered, like she understood everything he was saying without having really said anything.

“Yes.”

“I’m going to head out with Ginny back to my apartment. We’ll be in town a couple more days, if you need anything. I hope you talk to Charlie or get yourself figured out. Don’t go around kissing people if you don’t want to.”

“I’ll walk you back in.”

“Thank you, Knox. For everything.”

“You too.”

They walked back to the bar, and everybody had settled in a bit, drinking and laughing and enjoying themselves. Charlie looked like he was on edge, and Ginny was trying to make friends. Chris and Ginny made their exits, Knox hugged Chris goodbye, and they left together, quickly.

He sank next to Charlie in the booth, and as Meeks wondered aloud what had happened between the two of them, Knox lent up against Charlie’s ear, sliding a hand underneath the table to rest on his thigh. “Take me home tonight.”

He could see Charlie’s face grow red, and he just nodded. If anybody had seen the quick exchange, no one asked about it, because Knox was diving in to tell them of what had happened. And he said that it hurt, because of course it did. But it wasn’t the same anymore. Not with all the information hanging in him.

And as the night ticked away, everybody broke away, deciding upon

the subway or an Uber. Charlie hadn't had anything to drink in a few hours, so they clambered into his car, the air thick, like honey.

"Mine or yours?" Charlie asked.

"Whichever you want. Either way, I'll be there."

Chapter End Notes

me when Knox is going home (wherever Charlie is) .....

obnoxious, funny, true and mean

Chapter Summary

Charlie's back home.

“Do you have any idea how much I can’t fucking stand you?” Knox huffed, the two of them falling into his apartment, greeted by the colorful art. It felt more like home than Charlie’s own apartment, and he’d only been inside Knox’s place once.

“What are you getting at? What happened with Chris? Why is she here?” Questions were flowing out of Charlie’s lips like water out of a fountain. He couldn’t stop saying things.

“You know what I’m getting at, Dalton.”

“What?”

“Chris said she didn’t feel it with me. She feels it with Ginny.”

“What?” Charlie was swimming to keep up with the tide.

“She didn’t feel like she was on fire with me.”

“*Oh*,” Was all Charlie could choke out as he watched Knox continue to talk.

“You said you felt like when I touched you, every trail I left was destroyed by fire.”

Charlie didn't say anything, trying to weigh in on the situation. What was happening?

"Well I didn't get the chance to say before you so rudely pushed me into the wall, but that meant everything to me, too." Knox was pushing him back into his bedroom, their bodies growing closer as Charlie fell in front of him, his footsteps leading them through the opened door. They hadn't made contact yet, but when Charlie's knees hit the back of Knox's bed, it felt like it would be easy choice to sink down onto it, so he did. He felt that his throat was dry, and as he looked up at Knox, who was slinking in to meet him; he was wrapping himself around him to whisper in his ear. He didn't know if those two weeks away had really done anything at all to widen the gap between them. Currently, it was closing.

"I remember how your lips felt like they were scorching my entire soul, leaving char and ashes behind. I remember how tender you were. So eager to let me just be in charge, to please me, to let me just say what I wanted and where I wanted it. I remember how your hands felt on me as they burned into me. It was like you were branding me they were so fucking hot. I remember how you felt at every single moment of that night." His hand was back on Charlie's thigh, like it was earlier. Charlie liked to be in charge in situations like this normally, when vulnerability was enough to push them over the edge. They were standing on the precipice.

"Knox," He hadn't meant for it to sound so unkempt when it came off his lips, but there was no taking it back. He'd all but moaned it out. "What now?"

"I don't know." He said honestly, like his own desires weren't important because of all the words they hadn't said to each other.

"Well, how about this?" Charlie started before he could even think

twice. "I love that you are so infatuated with the color pink that everything from your closet to your favorite mug is pink. I love when you blush when somebody gives you a compliment and you get that little wrinkle in your nose. I love that when you listen to the Beatles, you can't help but sing along. I love that you have the nicest fucking friends and support system on the planet Earth and how whenever I take you home they always ask me how you are, because they love you so much. I love that you are the first thing I want to see every morning and the last person I want to talk to before I go to sleep at night. I wasted two fucking weeks being the biggest idiot imaginable, and I'm not saying this because I'm lonely, or because your hand is burning a hole through my trousers. I'm saying it because I want you in my life for better or for worse for the rest of it. And I wasted two weeks already."

"Charlie Dalton…" Knox felt like he was falling off that building he'd walked up. "I *hate* you. I *really* hate you."

"I know," Charlie smiled, threading a pinky with Knox's own. "I hate you too."

"Kiss me before I decide that making me wait for two weeks without so much as a goodbye wasn't worth it."

"Don't have to tell me twice." Charlie said, kissing Knox like he was air that he'd been missing.

The way Knox kissed him, it felt like a prayer. Like a promise. Like something Charlie had never experienced in his life. He pulled apart a moment later, watching him as they both panted, pawing at each other's shirts on the bed. Knox was looking at him like he'd just found God. Like he was something that was worth remembering. Like he was the Mona Lisa. Like he was a Monet waterscape. Like he was something that could hang in a museum.

As Charlie was struggling to take his shoes off (they both were), Knox smiled at him, laughing widely.

"What?" Charlie asked, because if this was all a dream, he wanted to wake up right now. Before he went and dived headfirst into the pool he'd created in his heart.

"I told him I was going to bring you home tonight."

"Who?" He cocked his head, his hands all over Knox as they kissed.

"Paul." Knox gestured to the poster hanging above his bed, and Charlie laughed so hard, he thought he was going to fall right over onto Knox.

"I love you, Knox."

Knox relaxed beneath him, like he was melting on a hot sidewalk in the summer. "I love you too, Charlie."

"Sorry it took me so long."

"Me too."

They kissed then, tenderly, and it was full of just as much fire as if they had been pawing at the other's mouths. This was what home and fire and passion and wanting to grow old in the suburbs with three kids and a dog and a cat and a lawn mower felt like. This was the beginning and the ending and everything in between.

“You’re so fucking beautiful, Overstreet. Perfect,” Charlie whispered in between their lips, and Knox let out a sound that made Charlie’s hair stand on end. “I know you thought I didn’t mean that when I said it. I did. I do. I’ve always meant it.”

“Charlie,” Knox pulled them apart, his hands resting underneath Charlie’s shirt as he looked at him like he was a masterpiece waiting to be hung at the Metropolitan Museum.

“What?” Charlie went back to kissing him, trailing down to his neck, his hands spreading everywhere they could find.

“If you don’t fuck me I think I’m going to die.”

“Was I really so good that you think you’ll die?” Charlie couldn’t help but crack, working his way underneath Knox’s shirt.

“I hate you.”

“I know.” He pulled off, grinning at him. “I hate you too.” It was Knox’s turn then, to pull his lips back to his own.

someone to share your good times

Chapter Summary

Knox wakes up to find his parents are knocking.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

As morning cracked into Knox's eyes, he found that he wasn't snug in Charlie's arms, and that the other man was sitting up, not wrapped around him like he'd wished and hoped he would be. "What's happening?" He asked, his wide eyes enough to coax Knox out of his post-coital sleeping bliss.

"What?" Knox groaned, sitting up next to him.

"Somebody's in your apartment." He said, anxiety ridden on his face.

A knock on Knox's door stifled the two into silence, the both of them on edge, unsure what was going on, unsure what had happened to have them killed right after everything they'd been through. Knox began to wonder aloud whether intruders normally knocked, but was stopped short by a familiar voice.

"KNOX!" Came the little voice, a voice that belonged to Nora, his youngest sister. "*KNOX*! We're here for my birthday!"

"Oh, fuck!" Knox cursed, and Charlie looked at him like he was absolutely, certifiably, insane. Like he was going to fall off of the bed and die. "I'll be out in a minute, Nora!"

"Take your time, son! We know it's early!" His father's voice came

next, and Knox felt like disappearing through the floorboards. Of course, out of all the times in the entire world, he had to wake up from the best sex of his life to find his entire family desperate to hang out.

"Your fucking dad is here?" Charlie whispered, fear and shock evident on his face. "*Fuck*!"

"I know, I know, sorry!" Knox dove out of bed, trying to find clothes. "I'll be out in a second! Just gotta get dressed!"

"Why the fuck are your parents here? Did you lock the place up last night?" Charlie was frantic, trying to find his pants, trying to find anything that was an article of clothing that was his own.

"Yeah, but they have keys, in case of emergencies. We were going to celebrate my little sister's birthday here, cause they're out in Manhattan, and she wanted to come over here for her birthday."

"Goddammit, what am I supposed to do?" Charlie huffed, looking desperately at his pants. "I can't wear these!"

"What?" Knox was pulling a shirt over his head, grabbing items out of his dresser. "Why?"

"Knox…" Charlie cocked his head, a sort of look that made Knox turn pink.

"Right. They're all ruined. I have stuff, I have stuff. I'll do your laundry. Throw it in my hamper."

“You should be doing my laundry. It’s your fault anyways.”

“Oh my god, get dressed.” Knox laughed, pressing a kiss to Charlie’s lips as he handed over some clothes.

A minute later, the two were standing together, unsure of what to do. “I don’t think I’m ready to meet your folks. They’re not going to like me. You *just* found out you were in love with me.”

“I’ve been in love with you way longer than last night. You know that.”

“They’re not going to like me. I’m not good with parents.”

“Maybe your own you’re not. But mine are going to love you.”

“How do you know that?”

“Because I love you.” Knox answered, simple and earnest. They stared at each other a moment, and Charlie pulled him in for a kiss. He was wearing his shirt from last night, and a pair of Knox’s boxers and jeans. He looked a bit ridiculous, like he’d been scrambling. Knox grinned, figuring he looked the same.

Turning on his heel, he opened the door to his apartment, finding his parents sitting on the couch, Nora and Gwen sitting on the floor as they poked through his coffee table books.

“Good morning, everybody,” Knox smiled, and stepped out of the way so that they could see Charlie. They all smiled at the greeting, but sat silently, clearly waiting for Knox to finish up introducing them. “This is Charlie Dalton.”

Charlie gave an awkward wave, unsure what to do; how to stand, how to hold himself. Knox could tell he was nervous, and he put a hand on his neck, which made Charlie’s ears grow red.

Knox’s father was first to get up, hugging Knox and patting him on the shoulders while his younger sisters came and started talking to him. His older sister was just about as tall as Charlie was, and she gave him a dirty look as she settled onto the couch.

“It’s so wonderful to meet you, Charlie!” Knox’s mother greeted, and Knox watched as Charlie fell in love with her, with his dad, with all of them. It was pretty hard not to. He couldn’t wipe the stupid grin from his face.

“Now, who are you, Charlie?” Knox heard his dad ask, shaking his hand.

“Well, sir, I’m Knox’s boyfriend.” That was it. The final nail in the coffin. Knox Overstreet was head over heels, painstakingly, horribly in love. “He’s been trying to hide me away, I think.”

“You’re Charlie Dalton? Like *Charlie Dalton*. From the airport?” Gwen cocked her head, shaking a ugly look onto her face. “What are you doing here? And why are you dating my brother?”

“Gwen,” His father said, “Well, I’m surprised, certainly. I thought you two hated each other.”

“You told your parents about me?” Charlie asked, looking at Knox with worried, fearful eyes.

“Well, yeah?” Knox couldn’t exactly lie, with so much out in the open. “I tell them everything.”

“Uh…” Knox could see Charlie begin to freak out, like he had no control over the situation anymore, like he could tell that everyone was going to hate him.

“I just thought you hated each other, I guess. It doesn’t look like you do.” Knox’s mother said, and the two just sort of smiled at each other before they looked back at the couple.

“I do hate him,” Charlie said, and Knox found his mouth falling open. What was happening this morning? “I hate him so much that I fell right in love with him.”

Knox could swear he saw his Mom’s eyes glisten with tears.

“I should probably get out of your hair, though. It’s a family affair, after all.” He smiled, looking at Knox for approval. Knox wanted to say something, but he was still so dumbstruck from the events of the last few hours that he couldn’t really say anything.

“You’ll probably just have to stay.” Gwen, the older of the two, spoke up again. “If you leave, we’ll just run into you again. You two can’t seem to find a way apart.”

“Yeah,” Knox finally said, feeling like his eyes were going to start pouring tears. “We can’t.”

"Besides, it's a family affair, Charlie." Knox's dad said, nodding to him.

“Have you all eaten?” Charlie asked, slipping a hand around Knox’s waist. “I’ll treat you to a nice birthday brunch.”

“Oh, that’s not necessary!” Knox’s father shook his head, “We can take care of the bill.”

“Really, Sir,” Charlie began, “I insist. For the birthday girl. How old are you turning, Nora?”

“Thirteen.”

“Consider it my birthday present to you. Don’t worry about it, really.”

“What do you do?” Nora asked, lying on the floor and sticking her legs up, making airplane noises. She was always sort of in her own little world. Knox loved that about her.

“I run Dalton banks, now that my father retired. Well, I don’t run all of them, but I do, I guess. I’m the CEO. I mostly just deal with the United States branches, and most of the branches in Europe.”

“Holy shit,” Knox’s mother said, a laugh escaping her. “You’re Dalton of Dalton Banks?”

“Yes,” Charlie nodded, “So, as nice as it would be for you to take me to brunch, I’d love to pay. I’ve got to make up for some lost time anyways.”

“This is boring. I’m hungry.” Nora said, sitting back up and twirling a piece of her hair. “Let’s go.”

“We’ll meet you downstairs,” Knox’s mother smiled at him, and then the two were left alone again.

“Your parents seemed impressed with my job. That’s good. I never thought of that before. I'm stable.”

“Charlie,” Knox smiled, all saccharine and wonderful. “Your job wouldn't matter to them, and it wouldn't matter to me. They loved you. And you love me. Charlie Dalton’s boyfriend has a good ring to it. I like it.”

“I didn’t ask, so I shouldn’t have assumed. I know everything with Chris ended so fast, and you… well, I want to be with you. I love you. I want to be with you all the time. For a long, long time.”

“Me too. I know its fast, but it’s not that scary to me. You make me feel like I’m on fire.”

Charlie turned him with his hand, so that they were facing each other. “I love you.”

“I love you too.” Knox answered, feeling like his whole body was

burning with pure, unfiltered joy.

Charlie pulled him in for a kiss, and it was sweet; passionate and kind and distinctly Charlie. Knox loved every single second of it.

“Let’s go,” Knox grinned.

“Don’t limp to breakfast,” Charlie whispered into his ear, and Knox gave him a bit of a shove, his eyes rolling while he bit back a laugh.

“I hate you.”

“Yeah, Knoxious.” Charlie smiled, threading his fingers with Knox’s own. Knox wanted that feeling to last forever. “I know.”

Chapter End Notes

sorry to the domesticity of the next two chapters let me live :PPPPP

find myself falling in love with you

Chapter Summary

Charlie's in love. This is going to last.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“You ready to head out?” Knox asks, putting his hands around Charlie’s waist and kissing his neck. It’s been three months since his parents' breakfast, and he finds that he’s been slowly bringing things to Charlie’s apartment. The sheets are pink. There’s a Beatles poster on the wall. Loud and garish and bright.

“Yeah,” Charlie smiles, turning around in his arms and pressing a kiss to Knox’s lips.

They gather up their things. A cake they baked and some gifts Knox has bought. They were heading to Meeks and Pitts place, a celebration ahead of them. It was their anniversary, and it was going to be the first time that they’d all hung out since Knox and Charlie had figured themselves out.

It doesn’t take that long before Charlie parks, and they’re both getting out, struggling with gifts and laughing and falling into each other. Meeks greets them at the door, hugging them and pressing kisses to their cheeks and so excited he can’t stand it.

“Happy birthday!” Knox smiles, a grin upon his face as he hands Pitts the presents he’s boughten. Pitts takes them and lets them fawn over his husband for a moment, happy to see everybody has gotten over themselves.

Charlie slinks towards the back as the day goes on, joking with Cameron and hanging off of Neil and sending Knox the smallest of grins whenever they look at each other. It's a day of hope, of promise. Of no worrying and just spending blissful time with their friends. Of watching Neil and Todd fall in love. Of watching Meeks and Pitts in their bliss. Of watching Cameron and Stick joke and laugh and stand close together.

They're packing up and saying their goodbyes, clamboring into Charlie's car as the night grows on. Today is perfect. It feels like it is. The music blaring is Charlie's choice this time, heavily influenced as of lately. He loves him. He does. It's a constant, beating presence in his mind.

"You okay?" Knox asks, threading his fingers into Charlie's hand that's on the console.

"Yeah," Charlie nods. He wants to say that he's never been so happy in his life. That he never thought he'd find somebody that loves him as much as Knox does. So, he does. He tells him this as they're driving back to Knox's place, back to the place that is so small Charlie isn't sure it warrants the rent Knox pays on the place. He's a hard worker, and so is Charlie, but they're making it work. This love that they have for each other. They have to, because they can't fall apart and come back together again.

Knox sits and listens and smiles and nods his head and agrees with everything Charlie is saying. There's a phone ringing between them, but neither bother to pick it up. They don't bother to even look at who it is until they're safe in Knox's little haven. He starts to make some decaf coffee, and Charlie feels like maybe he's found the secret to happiness, like all those poets Neil is always reading about say.

Charlie eventually looks at his phone: a text from Meeks, a text from his father. A missed call from his mother. He wants to answer it, but just looks at the voice mail. It's asking about the bank, how it's doing.

Nothing about how he is, how he feels now that he's in love. How he feels now that his life has been turned upside down.

"You okay?" Knox asks, because Knox is always wondering about him.

"Yeah," Charlie nods, "Just my mom."

"Work?"

"Yeah."

Knox shifts, and Charlie can tell that he wants to say what his parents had said to him. Knox's parents were quick to engage him in family affairs. Home cooked dinners and texts from Knox's mom about little things she thought Charlie would like. A picture of a dinosaur that Nora had drawn, an embarrassing photo of Knox in high school. Charlie thinks that maybe he was always destined to fall for him. With the funny bangs. The big nose.

"C'mere," Knox whispers, kissing Charlie's head, wrapping himself around him.

"I've got to get up early tomorrow. Work,"

"Yeah," Knox nods, because he has work too. "Me too."

"When are you moving in with me?" Charlie says, although he knows the answer before he asks it.

“You know how I feel about it. I can’t pay rent on your place, Charlie.”

“I’m not asking you to. I own it. I want you to be there with me.”

“I know you do, but…” Knox doesn’t have an argument planned and they both know it.

“You brighten it all up anyways. So cheerful and colorful.” Charlie kisses him. “You have been since the moment I met you.”

Knox grins.

“You wanted me so bad. One fucking bed,” Charlie laughs, and somewhere one of Knox's neighbors is practicing the guitar, like they always do. It’s a nice little melody. He doesn’t ask before he’s dancing with Knox in the kitchen, hands burning into each other as the coffee brews.

“I hate you.” Knox whines, but he’s a little lost in the moment too. “You know that pissed me off.”

“I had to figure out how to get under your skin. Literally.”

“You did a pretty good job,” Knox whispers.

They stay there a few moments, the lone guitar soft through the old

walls, and they dance. Slow and burning and perfect. Like they'd been in love a century before they'd met. Like they'd always find each other in the darkness. Like they were going to find each other again and again and again. So, Charlie says it. Because he wants to. Because he's a little bit in love. Because he's head over heels.

Chapter End Notes

> thank you guys so much for the support through this entire work. have no words for you all and your constant support. this fic meant a lot to me to write and i am so pleased by your positive response to it. big shoutout to citrusgothic and justahappylittletree. WAGHHH. Love you guys so. thank you kind readers!!!! as always there will be more knarlie content from me very soon. possibly in a few hours. you guys get it.

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!